

Science Fantasy

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Short Novel

**THE
WHOLE MAN**
John Brunner

**THE
LADY WAS JAZZ**
John Kippax

NULOOK
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Here is a truly delightful modern fantasy dealing with curative telepathy and its effects upon the human mind—as seen through the eyes of a psi doctor, himself in need of sympathy and understanding. Told with all the skill that John Brunner brought to his outstanding short novel “Earth is But A Star.”

THE WHOLE MAN

BY JOHN BRUNNER

I

Because he was who he was, he asked for—and they gave him—a private aircraft to take him anywhere in the world, to avoid the curious stares and whispers of other people. But because he was what he was even the faint surprise which showed in the eyes of the aircraft's pilot when they first met hurt, and hurt badly. He bore with it for a little ; then he made use of the aircraft less and less.

Because he was as he was, he liked either to be alone (and generally they would not allow him to be alone—he was too valuable) or here at the curative centre in Ulan Bator, where those who knew who he was no longer felt more than a stir of pity at his appearance, and those who did not know assumed him to be a patient like themselves.

He was—what ? A dwarf ; a cripple ; Gerald Howson, Psi. D., curative telepath first class, World Health Organisation. He was one of the hundred most important men in the world.

He remembered sometimes the feeling of expectation he had had when they first discovered his talent. The gift was rare, but so important that virtually everyone on earth was given tests for it. They had found him at the age of twenty-two ; he had actually been telling stories to a deaf-and-dumb girl when they caught up with him. In the stories, she was always very beautiful, instead of coarse-boned and heavy-faced ; he himself was usually some cross between Tarzan and Robin Hood.

She had cried when they explained they were going to take her friend away ; and he, when he understood what sort of future lay before him, had insisted that they take her along as well and see what they could do to cure her. (It was that insistence, so Pandit Singh was later to tell him, which assured the people who took him in hand that he would become not an industrial disputes arbitrator, not a peacemaker, nor any of the few other metiers open to projective telepathists, but a healer of sick minds).

He had of course assumed that now he was so important they would cure him, too : add a couple of cubits to his stature as he had been unable to, though he had indeed taken much thought, straighten out his twisted left leg and cleanse his face of its lopsided, slightly idiotic expression.

They gave the girl a trembler coil inside her skull, and she learned to hear ; they gave her bio-activated vocal cords of virtually imperishable plastic, so that she stumbled into possession of a musical, though hesitant, speaking voice. For a long time she paid frequent visits to Gerald Howson, and every time thanked him with tears in her eyes. But in the end the visits grew fewer ; finally they stopped, and he heard she had married a man from the same city block on which he and she both had been born, and had had children.

Whereas he was a dwarf cripple.

He remembered Pandit Singh explaining with all the kindness in the world just why this would have to be so. He had recounted how it was a miracle in itself that he had lived until he was discovered—a single serious illness or injury would have sent him to his grave. He was a hemophiliac—a bleeder—and a cut even on his finger would ooze for a day before it grudgingly began to seal over. (Well, they could give him prothrombin, and indeed now he always carried a phial of it in his pocket in case he did cut himself ; but prothrombin was a

crutch). And all his other recuperative and regenerative powers were, for some reason, equally slow, equally halting.

So they could not even give him plastic surgery on his face ; they demonstrated what they meant with a skin graft, just to convince him, and long before the slow-growing tissues had knit, and bloodvessels had twined into the graft, the transplant had gangrened and sloughed off. They could maintain a sort of half-life in the transplant, but then the bloodvessels never grew into it at all ; it was as if they made up their minds their work was being done for them.

This slowness extended to such things as his body hair. He had a barber attend him perhaps once in three months ; he never shaved more often than that, and his chin was scarcely fuzzy when the razor passed across it.

Pandit Singh had made it perfectly clear that without his handicap he would never have become a projective telepathist. The area of his brain which held the body-image for his metabolism to use in blue-printing tissue regeneration had atrophied under pressure from his organ of Funck. And consequently he had a telepathic voice which could be heard for more than a hundred miles when he cared to use it—but he could not grow a beard.

Exactly eleven years ago to the day he had had to resign himself to the fact that he would die in the same twisted body. But in eleven years he had never been reconciled to it. Other people in his profession, with comparable talents, didn't suffer from such compensating handicaps.

He was in the ward where they had brought a man called Hugh Choong—in fact, he was standing at the end of Choong's bed, looking down at him. There was a man with powers like his own, but he stood medium tall, and—excepting that he was wasted through having eaten nothing in twenty days—he was physically sound.

The injustice of it weighed heavily on Howson's mind.

Now Choong stirred and opened his eyes. It was as if a gigantic light had been switched on in the room ; everything stood out in bright, three-dimensional forms compared to which previously they had been in grey dusk. That was Choong's perception waking up. Only another telepathist would have noticed the difference.

Howson limped around the side of the bed and looked at the patient's face more closely. Yes, there was a resemblance. He remembered—

Who are you? Do I know you?

"Yes, you know me. Gerald Howson. You probably hate me." Deliberately, Howson used words; he was shutting down every batten he could on his blazing mind.

Choong closed and then re-opened his eyes, and moved his arm languidly on the coverlet. "I'm glad to meet you, Dr. Howson," he said. "Did you—uh—handle my case?"

Howson nodded. He said, "Why did you do it?"

"Do what? Oh! Go into fugue, you mean? Why—"

This man, Howson reflected bitterly in a fraction of a second, is a psychiatrist, and a very able one; he is also an industrial disputes arbitrator called on to handle the most complex decisions. Twenty days ago, he assembles a group of people he has barely met; he brings them together on benches in the square facing the hospital, and uses his imagination combined with his telepathic ability to take them from reality into a world of dreams. I—I—I who am cursed with a wish to do exactly that (only for choice, on my own) have to destroy his illusions, trespassing into his mind and creating superior illusions of my own until his fantasies become unbearable. And he comes back, and asks if I handled his case. What sort of a man *is* this, in truth?*

"—I felt I needed a holiday," said Choong with a wry smile.

"You what?"

"I needed a holiday. I needed to escape for a little. I made a few inquiries and saw no chance of getting one any other way. So—well, I had heard of a few cases of people like us creating a cataleptic group, so I asked half a dozen acquaintances if they liked the idea, and they did, so—so we went ahead."

He managed to push himself into a sitting position; he was obviously recovering fast. "I don't regret it in the slightest. It was a welcome change, and then of course I had the opportunity of seeing one of your people work at—at first hand, so to say."

Howson almost choked before he could reply; when he did, it was with an anger which blazed so fiercely that he used

projection instead of words. Essentially, he "said": *How can you be so blatantly selfish? Don't you know how much trouble and worry you've caused? Don't you care about the trouble you put me personally to? How do you think I liked fighting through the ridiculous empty fantasies you created and breaking them down? How do you feel about the time you wasted—time I could have used to help someone who was in real need?*

Choong cried out and put his hand to his head; a nurse came hastening up to demand what the matter was. Choong, recovering, waved her away, but she warned Howson sternly that there must be no repetition of this.

When the nurse had gone, Choong looked wryly at Howson. "You've got some power on you," he said. "Do you mind sticking to speech? I've had a good deal of your shock tactics recently, and my mind feels rather bruised. But to answer you—with a question—why do you feel so guilty about deriving pleasure from your abilities?"

Howson began to deny it; Choong cut him short. "Damn it, Howson, you wouldn't blame a man with physical gifts for enjoying himself at sports. Yet you blame me—and in so doing blame yourself—for taking pleasure in the use of a mental talent. I—oh: Howson. Of course. I identify you now. I can recall quite clearly what you did to bring me out of it. Ingenious! But where was I? Ah. I think you should have that cleared up, you know, that sense of guilt. It's not logical. I mean, don't you ever use your telepathy for your own enjoyment? For instance, my wife and I usually link up when we go to bed; I dream much more vividly than she does, and I like her to share my dreams. Don't you ever do that sort of thing?"

"I'm not married," said Howson in a voice like steel, and Choong flashed an impolite glance into his mind. When he spoke again, it was with a change of manner.

"I'm sorry. That was tactless. But—"

Howson said unwillingly, "There was once a time when I did. I don't often think about it now." He explained about the deaf-and-dumb girl who had been his companion in the past; he didn't know why he spoke of her to this comparative stranger, except perhaps as compensation for having trespassed in his mind. When he finished, Choong nodded.

"I imagine, if you'll forgive me saying so—you must enjoy your work, at any rate vicariously. It must—uh—be quite a

change to be a tough, resilient individual capable of great physical effort."

"I—yes, I do enjoy it. Sometimes, perhaps, I take longer than I need over a curative programme—so that I can escape from my own limitations for a greater length of time."

"Very natural," nodded Choong with a wise expression. "But regrettable. I think—and this is no more than a guess—I think if you allowed yourself to derive more pleasure from your abilities, you'd feel less tempted to use other people's fantasies for the same end."

"How can I?" said Howson bitterly. "Are you suggesting I should do as you've just done—set up a fantasy grouping? How could I tell Pandit Singh that I wanted to run away into the very kind of dreams I spend much of my time bringing other people back from? Although—" His voice tailed away.

"Yes?" prompted Choong encouragingly.

"Oh, he knows I'm jealous. And yet—well, tell me something. Presumably when you brought your—uh—associates into the square facing the hospital and sent them off into catalepsy, you were expecting to be found, expecting to be brought back from your world of dreams?"

"Of course." Choong smiled slightly. "I didn't much want to starve to death—and I was sure I wouldn't want to come back of my own accord."

"I couldn't do that," said Howson. "For one thing, I couldn't put enough trust in the ability of anyone else to bring me back. After all, I suppose I've demolished more fantasy worlds than any other telepathist alive. And for another thing—if someone else *did* manage to bring me back, it would undermine my confidence in my own ability."

He glanced round and saw that the ward nurse was standing at his side with a threatening expression.

"You wouldn't want to undo your good work by making Mr. Choong exhausted, would you now, Dr. Howson?" she suggested pointedly. "Could I ask you to finish your conversation?"

"All right," Howson consented dispiritedly. He was turning to limp away when Choong spoke up one final time.

"Then it's fairly clear that an escape which suits me or someone else doesn't suit you, Howson. You're a unique individual. Find your own way, then. There's bound to be one."

II

There's bound to be one. Howson wasn't quite sure whether Choong had physically spoken those last few words, or had eased them telepathically into his mind with the practised skill of a first-class psychiatrist implanting a suggestion in a patient. In a patient—that was amusing ! A few days before Howson had been the doctor, Choong his patient ; a moment had seen the roles reversed.

He had already ordered his personal attendant to pack him a bag ; now, though, as he hesitated outside Pandit Singh's office, he was beginning to feel doubts. Suppose he didn't find the solution to his problems ? Suppose he couldn't even *begin* to think of how to look for a solution ? (At the moment, he certainly hadn't begun).

Then he steeled himself, and pushed open the door. It was not so difficult as some other doors in the hospital for his spindly arms and short reach ; he suspected, without being sure, that Pandit Singh had quietly arranged for it to be kept oiled and free-moving so as not to embarrass Howson.

The distinguished-looking Indian at the big desk in the office didn't look up ; he said merely, " Hullo, Gerry—come in and sit down, won't you ? I shan't be a second."

Once a long time ago, Howson reflected as he hitched himself up on the slightly-smaller-than-average chair Singh kept specially for him, he had thought that the hospital director must have embryo telepathic faculties himself—he never bothered to look up to identify a visitor. Then he had realised the Indian merely had a superlative auditory memory for footsteps and voices.

Now Singh folded a package of case reports and docketed them for permanent filing ; he set down the pen he had been using and gave Howson a faint smile.

" When did you last take a holiday, Gerry ?" he inquired.

" Why—"

" All right, I know perfectly well. You haven't taken a holiday in six years. I do manage to persuade you to rest occasionally, but that's not enough. You used to fly off for a week or two at a time when you first came here—now you seem to prefer to take advantage of other people's fantasies instead. I think I'm probably a lot to blame, of course ; it struck me when you admitted you were jealous of Hugh Choong that I've simply got used to making the most of your talents. Comes

a difficult case, I relinquish the responsibility I ought to exercise in a sort of sublime and dreamy confidence in your ability to cure it. It won't do. It simply won't do."

He sat back and crossed his legs, and his smile returned and grew broader.

Feeling oddly on the defensive, Howson said, "Pan, you know that's not a fair way of looking at it. Though I say it myself, there's no one else who could handle some of the cases we get here, and never has been, barring Ilse Kronstadt, and she's dead. Besides, I don't mind—I can't think of a better use to put my time to than curing our patients, and I wouldn't be happy doing anything else."

"Then what's this I hear about you having your bags packed?" demanded Singh, leaning forward as if scoring a winning point. Over Howson's stammered reply, he laughed, and went on, "Oh, don't think I mind, Gerry. It's the best news I've heard in months. Because the plain fact is you *aren't* happy. It's no good trying to maintain that you are. And you don't have to apologise for doing it without warning, either. You'll probably say that it means wasting time which could be put to good use curing someone else. Who cares? A month or two's delay in straightening out a patient in fugue is neither here nor there; after all, there *are* other people on the staff who can handle the work, even if they aren't up to your standard. But if my prize assistant were to crack up, if you were to dash off into a fantasy world as you threatened to do, *that* would be a disaster."

He waited expectantly for Howson's reply; it came by fits and starts, because Howson had hardly yet had a chance to verbalise his feelings and intentions.

"You're perfectly right, Pan," he said. "I'm not altogether happy. I'm scared, to be frank. I'm scared of what I might give way to. I'm equally scared of going out into the world at large, because it never treated me very kindly. But there's some kind of difference between the two sorts of fear. I couldn't tell whether I was going to crack up or not because the possibility comes from within myself. But I feel I have at least some chance of standing up in the world now. I've *got* to. What it'll prove to me, I just can't guess. All I do know is that unless I do *something* I may one day go into some patient's fantasy world and find it so much to my liking that I may never want to come back. I couldn't—I don't think—escape into a

fantasy world of my own. But I might like someone else's fantasies equally well."

Pandit Singh picked up a pen from the desk top and tapped with it on the silent surface of a note-block. "I wish sometimes, Gerry, that I could have as clear an insight into the minds of my staff, particularly of you curative telepathists, as I can obtain into the minds of the patients. It always strikes me that you, all of you and you in particular, are walking a tight-rope over a volcano in eruption. At any moment, you may slip, or a piece of red-hot scoria may burn the rope through."

"Picturesque ; but too fancy," said Howson dryly. "It isn't a volcano—it's a plain old-fashioned hell, with devils complete."

He briskened slightly. "Well, what I mainly came in here to tell you, Pan, aside from the bare fact of my going, was that I want to go absolutely alone."

Singh looked startled. "But—"

"I think one of the reasons I lost interest in making the trips I used to do when I first came here was that I couldn't get away. Someone followed me everywhere, in case I stumbled, in case vicious children made mock of me, in case I found myself in trouble of some sort. What the hell good is that to me ? Maybe I can't go rock-climbing in the Caucasus ; maybe I can't go surf-riding at Bondi Beach. But damn it, I looked after myself on a tough city block for twenty-two years even before I knew what kind of powers I had. It might do me more good than anything else if I could re-learn how to do that."

Pandit Singh hesitated for a long time. Unwillingly, he nodded. "I suppose you're right, Gerry. I can't judge you. You're obviously not going to do anything so stupid as to chuck your prothrombin in the waste-bucket, I presume—independence has limits."

"I wouldn't do that. It would be like a—a diabetic throwing away his insulin. But dependence has limits, too, you know."

"Uh-huh. Well, what precisely do you propose to do ?"

"I shall send for a cab to go to the airport. I shall take a plane and go somewhere. I don't know where. And I'll come back in six months or a year. You'll see I have money ?"

"Naturally."

"Well, then," said Howson, oddly at a loss, "that seems to be all, doesn't it ?"

"It does rather." Pandit Singh got up and came round the desk ; he held out his hand as Howson slid down from his chair and did the same. "Good luck, Gerry—I think you know best what you want."

Howson was on the point of leaving the room when Singh raised his voice after him. "Gerry !"

"Yes ?"

"You—uh—you don't like attracting attention, I know. It occurs to me—well, I don't know, but I should have thought it was possible for someone with your ability to give the impression of being—or rather of looking different—I don't know . . ."

He let his voice tail away as he found himself momentarily looking at an olive-skinned man with a square beard, standing almost two metres in height ; he wore a peculiar barbarian costume mostly of leather studded with tarnished brass, and a huge sword dangled from his belt. He was muscular and good-looking in a tough way.

The stranger changed ; melted ; shrank until he was four feet three and beardless and slightly deformed—until, in fact, he was Gerald Howson.

"What would be the good ?" said Howson quietly, and went out of the room.

III

He didn't know until he was actually at the airport where he was going ; in fact, his voice seemed to come of its own accord when he asked for a ticket to the city which had been his home.

Home ! He never thought of it like that now. "Home" had for so long meant his private apartment in the great hospital at Ulan Bator, from which he could look out over the high white towers of the capital of Asia. It was more of a home than anywhere else had ever been. The furniture, from the tables, chairs and beds to the sanitary fittings in the adjacent bathroom, was tailored to him ; even the deep armchair where he sat often till four and five in the morning, reading, was cunningly designed to favour and cherish his twisted left leg. It was *his*, all of it—none of it was borrowed, or discarded by others. The normal-sized chair he kept for his rare visitors seemed like an intruder.

And yet for the first twenty-two years of his life he had known no other world than a certain rather shabby district of one particular city. He had known *of* another world—he learned about it from the cinema, from the rare occasions when someone who had an apartment with a TV set let him creep in and squat on the floor, and of course from books and magazines. But this world, which was enormous, seemed to be inhabited entirely by handsome men and beautiful women. Naturally, he dreamed.

The rat-hole which was his home wasn't all that much worse than most of the rooms in the area, but it *was* worse, or else he could never have kept it for himself. His living, such as it was, he had scraped from odd jobs and the carrying of messages ; everyone in the district knew him, knew he was intelligent enough to be trusted with the most complicated—but non-physical—tasks, knew he was weak enough to be cowed into discretion over the most private messages. He asked for payment in food and drink as often as not ; what money he accepted he spent on escape into the great world. Via the screen large and small, and via his " library " of novels, travel books and picture magazines.

But they had probably forgotten him by now. He hadn't changed much, but he was well-dressed instead of shabby, well-fed instead of pinched and scrawny—enough change to make people glance at him and pucker their foreheads as if in search of a half-vanished memory.

In a way, he found this comforting. Most places he had been, he had been a major curiosity, a freak ; here, though, he was not so much out of place. There was poverty here, and many people were sick or deformed a little ; he was deformed a little more than a little, but that was less conspicuous here than it would have been at Brasilia or Port Elizabeth or Kandy. (He had been there, too ; he had not enjoyed his stay).

He had left his bags at the airport, bringing with him only a light hand-case which he could easily manage. He had taken a cab as far as the outskirts of the district, but as soon as he came to the familiar streets he paid off the driver and started to walk. He managed to put the driver's air of astonishment and pity out of his mind as soon as he was on the territory he remembered.

There had been some changes, of course, in the intervening years. The first one which really impinged on him, though, was the fact that his old home had gone.

He stood on a street-corner and looked at the towering stack of low-priced apartments which had taken the place of the plaster-peeling rabbit warren of a tenement he knew. The same kind of street gangs chased past him ; the same kind of elderly wheezing cars rolled by, the same kind of crowded buses clanged and burped down the street. But the place where he had eked out his teen-age days was gone.

Oddly disappointed, though he had never thought he might actually want to see that dirty room again, he moved on. As he went, he found people glancing at him ; a small boy bravely threw a dirty word at him and dissolved into laughter. He tried to make his vacant face a little more purposeful, and confined himself to that instead of throwing an illusion into the child's mind.

A block or two north, he remembered, there had been a bar and grill, where the proprietor had often fed him for helping out in the kitchen on a Saturday night. He was hungry after his journey ; he made for the place.

It had changed in detail, not in layout ; there was an air of mild prosperity about the new fittings. He knew he would never be able to hitch himself on to a stool at the counter, so he went to a table instead, although this earned him a grimace from the lounging counterhand. "What'll it be ?" the young man called.

"Small portion of steak and French fries, and a can of beer," said Howson. There was no one else in the place at the moment, so his voice carried well enough ; usually it had insufficient power to cut through the hubbub of a crowd.

The food appeared ; the counterhand brought it and the beer over and set it down on the table. "Here y'are, shorty," he said in a friendly enough manner. "Hey—I think I seen you aroun' here before. Did I ?"

Thirteen years ago, he would have been about twelve, maybe—old enough to have seen me and possibly remembered. Howson rolled his beer from can to glass. "You might have," he said cautiously. "Does Charlie Birberger still run this place ?"

"Uh-huh. You a friend of his ?"

"Yes, I used to be. I wonder—if he's in, maybe he'd come out and have a word with me ?"

"I'll ask," said the counterhand obligingly, and went back behind his counter.

There was an exchange of shouts ; then Charlie Birberger himself, older, fatter, but otherwise unchanged, came out blinking into the bar. He caught sight of Howson and paused in his tracks.

Then he recovered himself, and waddled with an air of joviality across to Howson's table. "By God!" he said. "You must be Sara Howson's boy! Well, I never expected to see you in this place again, after all we heard about you. How you making out, hey?"

"Pretty well," said Howson. "Won't you sit down?"

"Uh? Oh, fine." Birberger fumbled a chair out from under the table, entrusted his bulk to it gingerly, and leaned to rest his arms on the table, hands folded together nervously. "Making out pretty well, hey? So we heard. We see about you sometimes in the news. Must be wonderful work you're doing—never thought you'd wind up where you are, I must admit. Been a pretty long time since you were in here, now—must be all of ten years."

"Thirteen," said Howson quietly.

"Long as that? You don't say," Birberger rambled on. He had a faint quaver in his rotund voice, and Howson was suddenly aware of a strange realisation: *damn it, the man's afraid of me.*

"Uh—any special reason for coming back?" Birberger probed clumsily. "Or you just looking up the old place?"

"Looking up old friends, more," Howson corrected. He took a sip of his beer; the glass was large, and reminded him of his days here, before he could order things like glasses and cutlery scaled down to his own proportions. "You're the first I've met since I got here an hour or two back."

"Well, it's good of you to count me as an old friend," said Birberger, brightening. "Y'know, I often think of the days when I useta let you help out in here—I remember you had quite an appetite for a"—he might have been going to say "dwarf," but caught himself well ahead and barely revealed that he had mentally changed gears to say—"young fella."

He sat back, as if relieved of some of his worries, and went on, "Y'know, I like to think I managed to give you a helping hand now and again. I guess maybe I suspected you were cut out for something better than this dump." Howson could imagine the rose-coloured filter in his memory, going up in self-justification; he remembered very clearly that Charlie

Birberger had been an irritable, hard-to-get-on-with employer, given to bawling his assistants (and especially Gerry Howson) out for clumsiness.

Well, no matter. He nodded and smiled, thus relieving Birberger of still more of his first disquiet. "You haven't done too badly yourself, Mr. Birberger," he said. "This place is pretty smart nowadays. Trade must be good."

Birberger denied it hotly, explaining that but for his own good management the place would long ago have been on the rocks ; Howson let him finish, for it would build him up in his own estimation and lend him confidence.

Meantime, he finished eating.

When he, and Birberger, had both done, he got up. "Well, maybe I'll look in again while I'm here," he said. "Can't stop now, though—I'm looking for a lot of people . . . By the way, there's one person in particular I want to track down. Do you remember a deaf-and-dumb girl who used to live in that same building where I did—the one that they've knocked down to make way for the new apartment block?"

"A deaf-and-dumb girl?" frowned Birberger. "What was her name?"

"Why—" began Howson. And stopped. Then went on : "Why," he said wonderingly, "I never knew. She couldn't talk of course, so she never told me. But surely you know her. She went away at the same time as I did, and they fixed her up with artificial speech and hearing and she came back here."

"Good—God!" said Birberger, as if struck by a tremendous revelation. "Of course I know who you mean. That's Mary Williams. Married to a guy over on West Walnut, and got a growing family. Only I don't see her these days. That's her for certain—I distinctly remember her getting artificial hearing an' that."

"Over on West Walnut? Where's that?"

"New district since your time, I believe. On the east side of town. Take a number nineteen bus an' it goes right there." Birberger could hardly disguise his eagerness to see Howson safely on that bus and out of his area.

So Howson accomodated him, paying his bill and gathering up his hand-case. Birberger stumped to the door with him, and shook his hand with care as if touching something rather fragile, but his insistance that Howson should come back as soon as he could rang rather thin.

On an impulse, Howson asked him, "Say, Mr. Birberger—what's your picture of the kind of work I do these days?"

Startled, Birberger improvised, "Why, you—you sort of look into crazy people's minds and—and straighten them out, tell what's wrong with them. Don't you?"

"That's right," Howson said a little unkindly. "Don't worry, though—I'm not looking into your mind. After all, you're not crazy, are you?"

The seeds of the most peculiar kind of doubt were germinating in Birberger's mind as Howson limped down the street towards the stop for an east-bound bus.

IV

Odd : people's differing attitudes to telepathists of any kind. Howson sat in the single seat at the front of the bus near the driver—he was less noticeable there—and pondered the whole question in a way he hadn't done for several years. After all, at the hospital in Ulan Bator there were always three or four telepathists residential on the staff, and often (though not as often as might have been wished) a trainee as well. Their presence was integrated into the routine ; they were as accepted and acceptable as the normal psychologists and surgeons.

Occasionally Howson had assisted in the induction of a trainee ; their attitudes varied, too—some had reacted like a child with a new-found toy, taking great pleasure in their talent even before they had mastered it properly ; some had been like members of a family in Nazi Germany, who had just discovered that they had Jewish ancestry and were trying desperately to pretend that it made no difference to themselves. It all depended on their background.

The telepathists were so few they barely constituted a minority group, and that—so far—had been their salvation. A tiny fraction of the population of the world had actually met someone with the power ; consequently, though most people had prejudices ("I don't really think I'd like someone poking around in *my* mind—I mean, it's the ultimate invasion of privacy, isn't it?—but I don't doubt that they do do some wonderful work !"), few had attitudes.

It was, of course, a mutation ; usually it extended only to an extreme hypertrophy of the little group of cells at the base of the brain known as the organ of Funck, which was capable of

extraordinary sensitive resonance with the nerve currents of other human beings. The resonance was reciprocal ; if one strikes middle C on a piano with the sustaining pedal down, and then releases the key, one will hear every other C in the instrument ringing very faintly in response. Fainter still, the thirds, fifths and sevenths will also vibrate in sympathy. The more highly developed and functioning the other brain, the more difficult it was for the organ of Funck in the telepathist's brain to influence it. The amount of information which actually passed was staggering ; they had given up trying to measure it directly.

Occasionally—once in every few hundred telepathists, and each of those telepathists in turn was one of every few hundred *million* people—an Ilse Kronstadt or Gerry Howson was born, and that person's organ of Funck could cope with the total identity of another individual ; with the consciousness, in greater or lesser detail, of dozens of other individual ; with the superficial "now" of (possibly) thousands of individuals. Only on that scale the power was practically useless ; Gerry Howson could lie awake in his bed at Ulan Bator and "listen" to the whole hospital, picturing it as a unit functioning in harmony for a common purpose, but he could not pick out more than generalisations such as "I am in pain" or "I am handling an important problem" without losing touch with the totality.

Surprise, distaste, pity, mingled in the glances of those passengers on the bus, and of the driver, who noticed him. He wondered how much all these would have been exaggerated if they had known him for what he was. Only they didn't ; he saw no one he remembered from the old days.

"West Walnut, pal," said the driver as he slowed the bus. He was trying to control his prejudice-reactions, and for that Howson gave him a projective wave of warm gratitude. As he stepped to the ground, he was curious enough to "look" back, and found the driver thinking with a smile, "Peculiar-looking character ! Nice guy, though . . ."

He limped to a nearby bench and sat down, looking about him. This was definitely new since his day : the houses were well laid out, there were patches of lawn between them, and children on their way home from school ran and laughed along the paths. He liked what he saw.

A girl—pretty, about twenty, and smartly though not expensively dressed—went past, and he called to her. "Miss!"

She turned, but did not approach him; his appearance unnerved her.

"Miss, do you know where a Mrs. Mary Williams lives near here?"

She hesitated. "No, I'm sorry," she said at length. "I don't know any Williamses here."

She did, of course; she was insuring herself against a million-to-one chance that Howson might spell trouble for her friends, and did not want the responsibility. Howson made his mind up in a moment; the girl forgot what she had seen when she first turned to answer him, and found herself addressing a pleasant-looking man of middle height with a frank smile and an attractive voice.

"Are you quite sure?" pressed Howson. "I'm certain they live quite close."

She gave ground, wondering why she had had qualms in the first place. "Well, I believe there are some people called Williams in number 21, although I don't know them personally—"

"Thank you very much," said Howson, and his projected identity smiled again. The girl went on her way rather conscious of his eyes following her.

Number 21. Howson left the bench and went slowly along the path looking for figures on doors. He didn't have very far to go; the house was similar to but not identical with its neighbours on either side, and the flowerbeds were carefully tended. Yes, there was the name over the mailbox—S. Williams. He pressed the bell, having to reach up to it.

After a while the door was cautiously opened, just a crack, and a girl of eight or nine looked through the gap. "What do you want?" she said timidly.

"Does Mrs. Mary Williams live here?" Howson asked.

"Mummy isn't home," the little girl said. "I'm sorry." She sounded very grown up and official.

"Will she be back soon? I'm an old friend of hers, and I want to see her—"

"What is it, Jill?" a boy's voice came from the interior.

"There's a man here who wants to see Mummy," said Jill, and a clatter of shoes announced her brother's descent of the stairs. In a moment the door was opened wide, and a boy a

year or two older than his sister was standing there. He was startled at Howson's appearance, and didn't try to conceal the fact, but he had obviously been taught to be polite, and asked him to come in and wait. "Mummy won't be long," he explained. "She's gone to see Mrs. Olling next door."

Howson thanked him and limped into the lounge. Behind him, as he sat down, he heard an argument going on—Jill complaining that they oughtn't to have let a stranger into the house, and her brother countering scornfully that anyway Howson was no bigger than himself and couldn't be dangerous.

Shyly, the children came into the lounge and sat down on a sofa opposite the chair Howson had taken, at a loss for anything to say. Howson had not had anything to do with children for many years; he felt almost equally tongue-tied.

"Maybe your mother has told you about me," he ventured. "I'm called Gerry—Gerry Howson. I used to know your mother when she was quite a little girl. You're Jill, aren't you? And you're—?"

"I'm Bobby," said the boy. "Uh—do you live near here, Mr. Howson?"

"No, I live in Ulan Bator, in Mongolia. I'm a doctor at a big hospital there."

"A doctor!" This began to thaw Jill's shyness; she leaned forward excitedly. "Ooh! I'm going to be a nurse when I grow up."

"How about you, Bobby? Do you want to be a doctor?"

"No, I don't," said the boy rather slightly. "I want to be an airline pilot or a submarine captain." Then he relented, and with a gravity imitated exactly from some stiff-mannered adult, added, "I'm sure a doctor's work is very interesting, but I don't think it would suit me."

"Mr. Howson," said Jill with a puzzled expression, "if you are a doctor, why have you got a bad leg? Can't you have it fixed?"

"Jill!" said Bobby in horrified tones. "You *know* you shouldn't say things like that to people!"

He *was* being grown-up, thought Howson with amusement. "I don't mind," he said. "No, Jill, I can't have it fixed. It happened when I was very little, and now there's nothing that can be done. Besides, I'm not that kind of doctor. I—" He wondered for a moment how to explain his work, and recollected Birberger's halting, naive version of it. "I look into sick people's minds and tell what's wrong with them."

Bobby's adult manners vanished in a wave of surprise. "You mean you're a *crazy* doctor? You straighten out mad people?"

"That's right," said Howson with a hint of a smile. "I straighten out mad people. Only 'mad' isn't a very nice word. They're sick; just like you and I get sick if we eat too much, they get sick because they find life too complicated for them. There are lots of nice people who come to my hospital."

They didn't contest the statement, but their disbelief was apparent. Howson sighed. "Would you like me to tell you a story about my work?" he suggested. "I used to tell your mother stories when we were both little . . . Do you like to be told stories?"

"Depends on the story," said Bobby cautiously. Jill had been sitting in wide-eyed wonder since Howson's revelation that he was a "crazy doctor." Now she spoke up in support of her brother.

"I don't think I'd like a story about crazy people," she said doubtfully. "Even if they are just sick."

"It's very exciting," said Howson quietly. "Much more exciting than being a pilot or a submarine captain, really. It's a wonderful job." He found time to ask himself when he had last realised how completely he meant that declaration before he went on.

"Suppose I tell you about a friend of mine who was sick in my hospital . . ."

Gently, the technique coming back to him as if he had used it yesterday, he projected the hint that the children should close their eyes—just as he had done so long ago for the poor deaf-and-dumb girl he could not communicate with any other way but in bright, plain images and rich sensory impressions.

First . . . A hospital ward; efficiency, confidence, kindness. Pretty nurses—Jill could be one of them for an instant, calming a pitiful patient whose tortured face reflected gratitude for her mere presence. With his external eyes he saw a smile pass over her face.

Now . . . A glance inside the patient's mind. Nightmare: but not a child's nightmare, which would have been too terrifying for them. An adult nightmare, rather—too complex for them to understand fully but clear enough for them to understand without suffering.

And then . . . Sharp, well-defined images : the patient running through the corridors of his own mind pursued by horrors from his subconscious ; running for help and finding none, until the presence of the doctor suggested reassurance and comfort. Then the harrying monsters paused in their chase ; arming themselves with weapons which they could create by merely thinking, patient and doctor together cowed the things and drove them back, cornered them, slew them . . .

It was a compound of half a dozen cases he had handled as a novice, simple, vigorous and exciting without being too fearful. When he had done, Howson gently broke the link and suggested that they open their eyes again, and the children sat up.

"Goodness," said Bobby with considerable new respect. "Is it really like that?" But he knew it was really like that, and didn't press for an answer.

Jill was about to say something when she glanced around and saw through the open door of the lounge into the entrance hall. "Why, there's Mummy!" she exclaimed. "Mummy, there's a man here to see you—he's been telling us such an exciting story like the ones he used to tell you!"

Mary Williams pushed the door fully open and looked at Howson. Her face—rather coarse, as he remembered it, but with more personality in it and cleverly made up—set in a frozen stare. Through lips which she barely opened she said, "That was nice of him. Now maybe you'd like to run along so I can talk to Mr. Howson alone."

Obediently the children got up and started for the door. "Will you tell us some more stories some time, please?" Jill threw over her shoulder as they went out.

"If you like," said Howson, smiling ; and when they had gone, added to Mary, "Two fine children you have there!"

She ignored the remark. With her face still icy cold and reserved, she said, "Well? What have you come back to plague me for, Gerry?"

V

Howson waited in blank astonishment for a few seconds. When she did not elaborate this amazing statement, he said only, "I wanted to find out how you were getting on. If you call this plaguing you, I'll go. Right away." He rose to his feet and picked up his hand-case, half-expecting her to open the

door for him and say it was good riddance. Instead, she burst into tears.

"Mary!" he exclaimed, and then realised and spoke in the same moment. "You know, that's the first time I've ever called you by name! And we knew each other for a very long time, didn't we?"

She mastered her crying, and gestured for him to sit down again. "I'm sorry," she said weakly—it was amazing how completely she had learned to control her artificial vocal cords; unless one had looked for the scar on her throat, one could never have told they had been inserted by the hand of man. "It just all came back to me with a rush. It—it's nice of you to think of calling on me, Gerry."

"But what did you mean when you said I'd come back to plague you?"

"Isn't it obvious?" She waved in an all-embracing manner to take in the room, the house, the entire suburb. "Now you *have* come, what have you found? An ordinary sort of housewife with a couple of ordinary kids and a decent enough kind of husband. You can find a million people like me wherever you go. Only—"

She dabbed her eyes dry with a handkerchief and sat up, crossing her legs. "Only you reminded me of what I was going to be. Do you remember? That was why I stopped coming to see you. I'm sorry about that, but I was sure you must know—I mean, with your abilities . . ." The words tailed off into silence.

"I never looked into your mind or anyone else's unless I was invited to," said Howson softly. "You never let me suspect there was anything wrong. You seemed very happy."

"Why shouldn't I? I didn't really suspect it myself. It was just—well, in the stories you used to tell me, when we were kids together, you remember I was always beautiful and sought-after, and I could hear and talk like anyone else. That was the way I thought it was going to be. I was going to be beautiful and sought-after when I had my ears and my voice. But the only part that came true was the 'like anyone else.' I thought I'd got over it—until I came in through the door and saw you sitting here. And it reminded me that instead of being the—the princess in the fairytale, I'm plain Mary Williams of 21 West Walnut, and I shall never be anything else."

"I'm sorry," said Howson inadequately. He understood, all right—he understood perfectly.

"And of course I've been so jealous of you," she went on in a level tone. "While I had to drop back into this anonymous kind of existence, you became important and famous and seemed to forget about me—"

"I suppose you wouldn't believe me," said Howson meditatively, "If I were to tell you that sometimes I feel as if I could readily give up fame and importance if I could look another man, an ordinary man, straight in the eye, and walk down the street without limping."

She looked at him. In an odd tone, she said, "Yes, Gerry, I think I do believe you. I'm sorry. I heard they hadn't been able to do anything—about your leg, I mean, and all the rest of it."

A thought struck her, and she stiffened. "Gerry—you haven't really been telling Jill and Bobby the same kind of stories you told me? I'd never forgive you if you cursed them with the same kind of discontent!"

"No, you needn't worry. I told them about my work at the hospital, and Jill says she wants to be a nurse, so I don't think you'll find it leaves them discontented."

"It left me that way," Mary mused. "I can still remember the stories you told me more vividly and clearly than I can remember the dreadful room where we used to sit and shiver. The stories are brighter—sort of more definite. While the real world of those days has faded into a blur of browns and greys."

She looked up. "I use some of your stories sometimes, you know. I tell them to the children when they go to bed. But I never told them where I got them from."

"Will you tell them now they've met me?"

"I suppose it doesn't matter if I do."

"You speak very well, Mary—I don't just mean that you use your vocal cords efficiently. You choose your words with a sort of style. Have you ever thought of writing those stories down?"

"No!" She stared at him. "What makes you think I could be a writer?"

Howson shrugged. "Try it. I mean it quite seriously—try it. Even if you don't do them as well as I think you will—and that would be well enough to have them printed—it will help greatly to soften the pain you feel. It'll give them their proper character: pure romance and imagination."

She had not yet replied when there were steps in the hall, and the sound of the children running. A man's voice was heard greeting them affectionately.

"That'll be Steve come home," said Mary dispiritedly. "I wish—"

Howson didn't learn what she wished, for at that moment Williams himself entered the lounge and stopped in surprise at seeing Howson there. "Uh—good afternoon," he said blankly, his eyes asking furious questions of his wife.

"Steve, this is—I suppose I should call you 'doctor,' shouldn't I, Gerry?—Dr. Gerry Howson, from Ulan Bator. He used to be a friend of mine before I met you."

Howson got up to shake hands; Williams barely controlled his shock at having to reach so far down, and failed signally to mask the fact that he thought his wife's choice of youthful friends must have been a peculiar one.

"Gerry is a psychiatrist," Mary explained further, and Howson shook his head.

"Not exactly. I'm actually a curative telepathist on the staff of the general mental hospital there—the World Health Organisation's Asian headquarters, you know."

"A telepathist!" The information plainly shook Williams severely. "Uh—well, how interesting! I never met one of you people before." *And never particularly wanted to*, supplied Howson silently.

There was a pause. Mary tried to fill it by saying in a bright tone, "You'll stay for supper with us, Gerry, I hope?" She frowned down her husband's frantic looks, but Howson suddenly felt he could face no more of this. He made great play of looking at his watch.

"I'm very sorry, but I daren't stay any longer," he said. "I haven't got long to spend here, and I want to look up a good many old acquaintances. I'll have to be on my way."

He collected his case, shook hands, and took his leave. Just as he was on the doorstep, he looked back at Mary. "Apologise to the children for my not being able to tell them another story, won't you?" he said. "And—try not to hate me."

"I won't," said Mary with a wan smile.

"And try not to pity me, either," he finished savagely, turning his back. He wished he could have stormed down the path to the roadway, instead of limping like a rather ridiculous jointed doll.

VI

It wasn't true, of course, that he wanted to look up a lot of people. He had had—somewhere in the back of his mind—an impression that had endured him for many years : the notion that of all the things he had done in his life, he had least cause to regret the episode of the deaf-and-dumb girl. He had thought he had acted well—had, in effect, here if anywhere created unalloyed, disinterested happiness. It was a jolt that shook the very foundations of his personality to learn that instead he had left a burden of misery.

Where should he go now ? He only knew he wanted to go away from here. Particularly, he didn't want to be anywhere where he might be remembered and recognised. Best, then, to strike across town to a district where he had never been all the time he was living here, and sink into the anonymity of a crowd. He couldn't be otherwise than conspicuous, of course, but he could at least be an unknown freak.

A cruising cab failed to answer his hail ; in sudden anger he made as if to project a deafening mental shout into the driver's mind, but at the last moment he realised that the man had merely mistaken him for a child playing a prank. He contented himself with suggesting that the driver think again, and this time the vehicle swung around and came back to him.

The driver was a thick-set man with humorous eyes ; he took in Howson's appearance, considered it, dismissed it. " Sorry, pal," he said cheerfully. " Dreaming, I guess. I lose more fares that way—Where to ?"

What was the name of the street ? " There's a sort of maze of streets just the other side of Grand Avenue, isn't there ?" Howson said. " Around there will do."

" Sort of Jackson Street way? I know where y'mean. Okay."

It was beginning to darken when he paid the cab off and looked around him. He welcomed the dimness of the side-streets—Grand Avenue itself no longer lived up to its name, since the fashionable quarters had drifted slightly even in the thirteen years he had been away, and completed a process which had already been in operation when he left. Here there was a rather shabby bar, lights low, uncrowded. That would serve as well as anywhere for a refuge.

He went in, ordered a drink, and hid himself away in the furthest corner, feeling a deep-seated misery. What next ? Where next ?

Now that he could view his journey with detachment, he saw that he must originally have been motivated by a need—a need to justify himself to himself. “Why,” Hugh Choong had asked from his hospital bed, “why do you feel guilty about using your ability for your own enjoyment?”

Because, he might have answered, when I did use it for my own enjoyment it repaid me with the subconscious realisation that I had caused suffering.

He might, he now realised, have deduced that poor Mary would hate her ordinary existence once she had realised how ordinary it was in truth. He had not examined the idea too closely—presumably, because he feared the consequence of actually knowing. Now he knew indeed, and he was shorn of a protection he had long valued. He had to face the fact that he had assumed he had bestowed disinterested happiness—and had in truth been using Mary as an admiring and delighted audience for his own entertainment of himself.

Well, he saw it now with great clarity, but the simple knowledge left him less able than before to reconcile himself to the situation as it was.

Other things grew clear in his mind, too. Maybe at least part of his insistence on running himself ragged, exhausting himself on an unbroken succession of patients in the Ulan Bator mental hospital, was due to a desire to see them feel indebted to him. Much of his life before he was discovered for what he was had been a patchwork of favours received from people of all sorts—even Charlie Birberger had been speaking only the literal truth when he mentioned giving Howson a helping hand. Maybe, in a twisted way, he was eager for normal un-handicapped people to feel indebted to him for favours he might have withheld.

But this self-analysis could go on indefinitely. He could comfort himself with the indubitable fact that he had done a hell of a lot of good work. And would do more. But he had come away from Ulan Bator in order to restore some kind of confidence in himself, and so far he had merely succeeded in depriving himself of a number of self-defensive illusions. He had a long way to go, and a lot to do, before he could safely return to his job and feel secure in it.

Only he had *no* idea where to go next.

He ordered another drink ; it was brought, and as he sipped it he grew aware of raised voices at the opposite table. A

group of two young men—both shabby, both at least two days unshaven—and a plain girl with fair hair and a rather shapeless dress, were getting somewhat heated over an argument. At least, one man and the girl were ; the other man seemed to be looking on with amusement.

"But don't you *see*?" thundered the girl, slamming her open palm on the table so that the trio's glasses jumped. "All you're doing is to discard everything that's been produced in a century and a half in order to go back to something which has been done twenty times over better than *you'll* ever manage to do it!"

"You must be blind, deaf, dumb and moronic to say a stupid thing like that!" blazed back her opponent. "One of your most damnable faults, and you've got plenty, is making wild and empty generalisations. Anyone with a grain of intelligence—"

"Excuse me, you two," said the mildly amused young man. "I'll come back when it's less deafening."

"Good riddance!" snapped the girl as he picked up his drink and crossed the floor to Howson's table. Howson bridled instinctively, but the stranger took in his appearance without comment.

"Mind if I sit over here for a bit? I won't be able to get a word in edgewise with those two for at least half an hour, and in any case neither of them really knows what they're talking about. Cigarette?"

Howson was on the point of refusing—no one at the hospital habitually smoked, since even with carcinogen-free tobacco it might turn out to be a costly luxury—when it occurred to him that this young man had no means of knowing that he was anything other than what his vacant face suggested, yet had accepted him without strain and with perfect aplomb, as a fellow man. He took the cigarette with a word of thanks.

"What's it all about, anyway?" he ventured as he bent to take a light.

"Charma," said the other round his cigarette, contriving to draw in the flame and speak simultaneously, "is of course perfectly right in insisting that Jay is doing thoroughly incompetent work. She is totally wrong in maintaining that he is merely repeating something which has been done hundreds of times. He isn't—he's got an idea in his head which *is* fairly original, but he simply isn't good enough to cope with it. He thinks he is. That's about all there is to it."

"Does this happen a lot?"

"It goes on all the flaming time," said the young man in a ponderous and aggrieved tone.

"And what sort of work?"

"Uh—oh, bit hard to define. I suppose you might call it liquid mobiles. Charma's got it into her head that it's derived in equal parts from Hero's syphons, the fountains at Versailles and a fireworks display, and consequently isn't original, while Jay kids himself he never borrowed an idea from anyone or anywhere. Main trouble is he ought to be a chemist and hydrodynamicist as well as a guy with an eye for a lighting effect, and he isn't, so he can't make the most of the technique's very genuine possibilities."

About twenty-two or twenty-three, Howson judged as he looked at his new acquaintance. He was of medium height, plump, good-looking, with untidy black hair and heavy glasses. He wore an elderly shirt open at the neck, dark trousers with light stains on the knees, and open sandals. An enormous watch caught the light on his wrist. A sheaf of pens and pencils was clipped in his shirt pocket.

"You're students?" suggested Howson. The other shook his head.

"No more, no more. We got a wee bit dissatisfied with academic standards a few months ago, and since the academic standard-bearers were likewise less than pleased with us, we agreed to sign a truce and get the hell out. 'Nother drink?"

"No, let me," said Howson, and signalled a waiter. He paid with the topmost of a bundle of notes which made his companion whistle with awe.

"It always gives me pleasure to accept a drink from the rich," he said solemnly. "It means I am doing my humble bit towards the redistribution of capital."

"Better set 'em up for those two as well," Howson told the waiter, indicating Jay and Charma. "Uh—what's your own particular line?"

"I compose. Badly. What's yours?"

"I'm a doctor," said Howson after a second's hesitation, and his companion nodded with interest.

"I'd never have guessed. Have to tell Brian about that—he's an embryo sociologist we know, who's doing a survey to correlate professions and trades with physical types. Mark you, it's not all that important that you should be a doctor—

someone like you is calculated to throw a spanner in the works no matter what you do for a living—a sort of wild variable, in fact.”

Howson was astonished to find himself uttering his reply with hardly any self-consciousness. “Unless I’d been a circus dwarf or something like that,” he said.

“True,” said the other reflectively. “Oh, what the hell—he could find an excuse to fit you into the theory anyway. I keep trying to wipe that complacent grin off his face—best one I came up with yet was a woman of fifty-odd, fat as a hippopotamus, weighed about three hundred pounds, who’d been teaching dancing for thirty years. He even fitted her in, blast him. Oh well—say, you’ve managed to quiet them down !”

Howson glanced round. Charma was lifting her newly-filled glass to him. “Your doing ?” she said. “Thanks !” And drank thirstily.

“Rudi !” Jay said with a glance at the clock on the wall. “Things ought to be waking up at Clara’s by now. Think we could drop by ?”

“Good idea. Hey, this guy here’s a doctor—I think we might tell Brian that and see how his face drops, no ?”

“Why not ?” said Charma, but Jay pulled a wry face.

“He’d never believe it. He didn’t believe in the dancing teacher till we took him round to her studio.”

“All right, we’ll prove it to him. Is he going to be at Clara’s tonight ?”

“When did you know that man miss a party ?” said Jay bitterly.

“I didn’t,” agreed Rudi. “Okay—that is, if you’re not doing anything—uh—?”

“Gerry,” supplied Howson. “Well, I’m afraid—” And he suddenly heard himself saying something to Pandit Singh about having at least some chance of standing up to the world now. Besides, if he could face people of any kind, it would be people like these—iconoclastic, angry about prejudice, ready to accept him if only because he was unusual and unique. He chopped off the sentence he had begun, and grinned instead.

“On course,” said Rudi with apparent irrelevance ; Howson assumed him to mean “that’s fine ” or something similar, and wondering at his own self-possession (did the drinks have something to do with it ?) he accompanied them down the aisle to the door.

"Taking a cab?" he suggested as they reached the street, and Jay gave a hoot of laughter.

"Jay, you are the most unobservant bastard," said Rudi severely. "Just because you're long-legged and bursting with vitamin C you think everyone shares your passion for wearing out shoe-leather. Now I, since I'm observant even if you're not, happen to have observed that Gerry here has a wad of money on him big enough to *buy* us a cab for the trip. Yes, certainly we'll take a cab," he finished, turning to Howson with an elaborate bow.

VII

By this time, of course, Howson knew that if he went no further on his journey he had achieved at least partial success.

He'd missed this kind of people—somehow. To be expected, really. One of the most significant effects of the impact of an improved standard of living, as he had superficially and intellectually been aware, is to postpone the age at which opinions congeal in the individual. Someone forced by poverty to avoid wasting time on enlarging his horizons which he needed for simply staying alive adopted the attitudes, ready-made, of his environment. This was one of the reasons why students formed the backbone of a good many early and mid-twentieth century revolutionary movements.

And there was a simple and encapsulated reason why, when their cab drew up at the address Jay had given the driver, Rudi picked up Howson's bag for him and gave him a hand out of the vehicle. And why Howson didn't raise an objection.

Improved standards of living hadn't made very much impact at all on *his* early life.

As he scrambled up the narrow stairway of the apartment building they had come to, he was asking himself whether they might be expected to have adopted attitudes and prejudices towards telepathists, if they hadn't done so towards dwarfs and cripples. He didn't feel tempted to find out the direct way—the whole question was too delicate.

His detachment returned to temper his sudden wave of enthusiasm, however, after he had actually been at the party for an hour or so. The premises were small—a bed-sitting room, with minuscule kitchen adjacent—and there were a *lot* of people in them—not including Brian, the man he was

supposed to have come to meet, but including a good many other students. For the first few minutes he rather enjoyed being shown off as a spanner to be put into Brian's works ; then, though, after a rapid and superficial series of introductions, the three who had brought him became embroiled in conversation with older friends, and left him to his own devices.

He was at two disadvantages then : his stature made it hard for the other people to keep him in on the argument unless they were sitting down and he was standing, and there was little opportunity to sit down except on the floor. On top of that, his voice was rather quiet at the best of times, and his words hard to catch if there was any competing noise. Here there was a lot of competing noise—voices raised in heated disagreement, cups and glasses and bottles clattering, even before someone arrived with a concertina and began to play regardless of who cared to listen.

He was beginning to feel a little lost and out of place when he noticed that someone had incautiously vacated a few square inches of the edge of the bed, next to the wall. He sat down and leaned back ; someone came past and poured him a fresh drink, and after that no one paid him any attention for several minutes.

He occupied himself in eavesdropping on a number of the conversations—it was impolite, but it was too interesting to be foregone. The only other student company he had ever found himself in was while they were training him for his work as a curative telepathist, and since he had had to instruct himself most of the time, he had missed the air of freedom he found here. More : there were so few telepathists that the entire company of his fellow-students during his training period numbered fewer than there were people in this one room.

Group A (he categorised them in the course of a brief survey) : two girls, apparently sisters, in yellow, and a man of twenty-five or so ; subject under examination—religion as a necessity of human social evolution. Group B : Jay, whom he knew, a long-haired boy who might still be in his teens, another with a slight stammer which kept getting in the way of his arguments, and an ugly woman with glasses and a fringe ; subject—a revue for which Jay was doing the decor. Group C : a good-looking girl of twenty and a man in a red sweater ; subject—each other. Howson felt a stir of envy and firmly diverted his attention.

Group D : four men with very loud voices standing close to the concertina-player; subject (sparked off, it seemed, by the instrument)—influence of new musical devices on the subsequent work of composers. One of the group kept trying to talk about his own work ; the others kept forcibly steering him away from it. Group E : two girls, one slightly drunk, the other perfectly sober, and two men ; subject—the drunken girl's views on modern poetry. Group F : three men, two in open-necked shirts and one in a sweater ; subject—the impossibility of living up to one's own ideals in later life.

Howson was flirting dangerously with the idea of joining in one of these conversations (any of them bar Group C) by telepathic means, when he realised the suggestion probably came from the drink before last and stopped himself with a sigh. Looking about him with his physical eyesight, he became aware of a girl who had sat down next to him while he was paying attention somewhere else, and was now looking at him with an amused expression. She was young, and fairly attractive, wearing a shapeless cardigan in a blue which clashed horribly with her green eyes.

"Good evening," she said with slight formality and more than a hint of mockery. "Meet me. I'm your hostess."

Howson sat up. "I'm sorry," he began. "Rudi and Jay insisted on my coming—"

"Oh, you're welcome," she said, dismissing the point with a wave of her hand. "If anyone ought to make apologies, I think I should, for neglecting a guest for so long. I just haven't had a spare moment. However : are you enjoying yourself?"

Howson nodded. "Yes, very much, thank you."

"I thought you might be, even if you didn't seem to be. What were you doing—drinking in atmosphere?"

"I suppose you might call it that." Howson tried to keep his voice at its loudest. "I was actually thinking that I'd never been in a room with quite so many interesting young people in it."

"Bloody, isn't it? I know. What really makes me wild is that at parties like this at least a dozen world-changing schemes get dreamed up, and never get put into practice. Oh, well—it's been happening for centuries, to be conservative, and it's likely to go on happening. Might be a good idea to note down

all the schemes and make something out of them—book, or pamphlet—in the hope that that way they'd get to someone who could make use of them." She unfocused her eyes, as if looking at a future possibility. "Might have a crack at it, at that. But that's probably just another of those same world-changing schemes."

"You're a writer?"

"Potential. Who told you?"

Howson shrugged; he didn't do it very well, for reasons connected with the withered muscles of his lower back. "I wasn't told. But you seem to have so many people here who write or do something of the kind."

The girl (her name would be Clara, if she was the hostess) offered him a cigarette; he refused, but borrowed someone else's burning one to light hers for her. (Where the hell had he got *that* from? Certainly he had never done such a thing in his life. Movie scene, perhaps, left over from—from . . . It came as a considerable shock to realise that he was actually in that same city where he had seen the film).

"Uh-huh," Clara was saying. "No, but me, I suffer from a congenital dissatisfaction with words. I mean—hell, if you just took the people at this party, or even a group of them, and attempted to explore just the few hours they spend here fully, you'd wind up with something twice the size of Proust. And you *still* couldn't be sure you were communicating with your audience. What one needs is a technique which would enable a pre-Columbian Amerind to understand a story about a twentieth-century Chinese. Then—brother! You'd be a writer!"

"I see what you mean," said Howson.

"How about you? What's your line?"

"I'm a doctor," said Howson. "Rudi wanted to bring me here to meet someone who's trying to correlate physical types with trades and professions. Brian was the name, I think."

"Oh, yes. Rudi's forever trying to prove he's wrong. I imagine you made him think pretty hard to fit you in. What did he say?"

"I don't know. I haven't been introduced to him yet."

"Well, if that isn't Rudi all over . . . Damn it, Brian's *been* here for the better part of an hour. Oh, maybe he'll remember sooner or later that he brought you here. Do you mind? Or do you want to get it over with and go?"

Howson shook his head and smiled. Someone tapped his arm and held a bottle over his now empty glass ; he shook his head and put the glass down on the bedside table.

"Who or what is Rudi exactly?" he asked. He was rather more interested in Rudi than in the other two whom he had met in the bar that evening ; he could, of course, have found out everything he wanted to know with one quick telepathic sweep, but he shrank from the notion as he would have done from the idea of intruding on—say—Pandit Singh's mind without invitation. Rudi struck him as having a somewhat more mature personality than most of the people here assembled.

"Rudi?" Clara blew smoke through her nostrils. "Rudi Allef is his full name. Half-Israeli, I gather. He came here under a grant a couple of years ago, and he was doing—well, I think he was doing—some rather good work. Only it wasn't the work he was supposed to be doing to qualify for the grant. So they discontinued it. So Jay and Charma Horne—"

"Jay and Charma Horne? Brother and sister?"

Clara stared at him. "No, whatever gave you that extraordinary idea? They're married."

"*Married!* Good lord!"

"Well—but why shouldn't they be?"

"It was just the way they were rowing with each other when I first saw them—doesn't matter. Sorry, go on."

"Ah-h—yes. So Jay and Charma, anyway, being slightly crazy, as you might expect in view of their having got married under the circumstances, quit in sympathy. Sorry, you were asking about Rudi. Rudi is—well, a problem."

"Odd you should say that," Howson remarked, puzzled. "He—well, obviously you know him better than I do. But I would have said he was rather a well-balanced and unproblematical person."

"He seems that way." Clara looked across the room to where the subject of their discussion sat on the floor near the concertina-player. Her eyes unfocused again. "Maybe one of these days, if he keeps up the act long enough, he'll convince himself that that's the way he really is. And a good thing, too. Otherwise—he will suffer a serious breakdown, and probably not be very much good to himself or anybody for a long, long time."

"Does the probability show?"

She came back to the present and shook herself very slightly. "If you know where to look for it. Sorry, I think I ought to go into circulation and attend to the other guests. See you later."

She had just got to her feet when she turned back. "I don't mean to be rude," she said. "But you seem to be a bit of a problem too. Are you?"

Howson looked her as hard in the eye as he could. "You seem to be good at spotting problems," he answered. "Make your own mind up."

"I deserved that," she said, and turned away.

And after all that, Howson realised, he still hadn't found out very much about Rudi Allef.

But at that moment Rudi himself remembered about Brian's sociological theories, dragged Brian away from his argument, and presented Howson to him. More than ever, as he looked at Rudi's eager grin, Howson found himself tempted to take one quick glance—just one!—inside that well-shaped head.

And if he did, and proceeded to display—even inadvertently—a knowledge of Rudi he couldn't possibly have obtained ordinarily in the course of a short acquaintance . . .? Howson suddenly realised that he felt what it must have been like for a mulatto "passing" in the southern U.S.A. a few years before. In that moment the room seemed to grow cold.

He just hadn't *known* this sort of feeling before. He was a dwarf and a cripple; all right, that much passed for granted. But there were some people, and might be some even here, who considered him alien. Maybe, when the time came to tell them (he didn't question that he would get to know them well enough to consider telling them) they would shrug and continue to regard him as a nice guy. Or maybe not.

Perhaps, in sheer self-defence, he ought to find out their opinions before committing himself—? He could do it in a moment!

Then he realised he had failed to catch something that was said to him, and reflexly picked the words out of Rudi's mind. He was halfway through his answer before he realised what he had done, and the room grew even colder. He was so used to being among people who knew him for what he was that he had acquired (inevitably) habits such as that one. The shock made him stumble in his answer, but he recovered and went on.

The one glimpse inside Rudi's mind had made the idea of probing deep still more tempting, but he told himself carefully: *he's not a patient, not even a fellow member of a hospital staff.* Too far already ; no further !

He forced himself to concentrate on the conversation, and Brian was already freeing himself of his harassed expression. "Oh, not at all," he was saying. "After all, people like Dr. Howson here are exceptions wherever you try to fit them in. I mean, they're like trying to predict the next atom of uranium due to disintegrate. You know one of them's going to pop, but you can't say which. Equally, you know that Dr. Howson has to fit in somewhere, but you couldn't predict where without a lot of other data—"

He droned on, while Howson's mind took hold of one short phrase and worried it over and over.

"Dr. Howson has to fit in somewhere . . ."

VIII

It was very much later when Clara sat down near him again ; the room was less full of people, which indicated that some of them must have gone home or decided to camp out on the stairs, for there was no other place they could be.

"Oh, that man Rudi," she said in a tone that mixed annoyance with tolerant long-suffering. "He's out in the kitchen being miserable. You wouldn't think it to look at him, of course. He's giving imitations of some of the university staff, with props, and about half a dozen idiots are laughing at it."

"If you wouldn't think it to look at him, how would you know ?" said Howson bluntly. Then a possibility occurred to him, and he caught himself. "I'm sorry. Obviously you know him very well."

"If you think he's—well, shall we be polite and say 'an intimate friend'—you're wrong," said Clara in a cool and slightly reproachful voice. "Matter of fact, I hardly knew him till this matter of his leaving the university came up the other day."

She looked puzzled. "Come to think of it . . ."

Since Howson had jumped to exactly the conclusion Clara had just disabused him of, he shared her puzzlement. There was an obvious explanation, of course, but it failed to fit the facts at a couple of points.

At that moment several people came out of the kitchen, laughing heartily, and Rudi was with them. Howson scanned his face : no, it betrayed no sign of the misery Clara had claimed to detect.

While his companions took their leave, reducing the number of survivors to about eight or nine, Rudi helped himself from a handy bottle without seeming to care much about what was in it, and went back into the kitchen. Howson assumed he had gone back to rejoin somebody. He looked around the room, trying to ignore the girl and the man in the red sweater, who had progressed beyond conversation as a means of showing their interest in each other.

"You seem, as I said before," Clara remarked as she came back to his side, "to have problems. Yes, I've made up my own mind on the point. What's worse, I've had to dismiss the obvious reasons why you should have them. After all, you can't have been all that handicapped if you're a doctor."

Her green eyes were very penetrating ; Howson felt uneasy, and the unease was not due to her remarking on his deformity. He said with an attempt at lightness, "Do you put all your guests through this interrogation ?"

"Only the uninvited ones who interest me," she said unperturbed.

Howson was framing his answer when he felt a shock that almost threw him forward off the bed. The intensity of it blinded him for a second ; it raged inside his skull like a fire. He knew what it was. Even before he had fully regained his senses he found himself shouting, "In the kitchen ! It's Rudi !"

Everyone in the room looked round in blank astonishment. And Howson realised that there hadn't been a sound.

Everyone in the room—except, it dawned on him, Clara. And Clara, white-faced, was already opening the kitchen door. She couldn't have got there so quickly in answer to his words of warning ; she *couldn't* have. And that meant—

She screamed.

Howson was cursing his unresponsive body as he struggled to his feet, when already half a dozen astonished people were crowding with a babble of horrified cries through the door. Their voices were incoherent ; it didn't matter. He knew perfectly well what had happened.

Brian, the sociologist, spoke up authoritatively. "Don't touch him! Get the little guy in here—he's a doctor. And someone phone for an ambulance! Clara, is there a phone?"

"Not in the house." The girl answered in a shaky but controlled voice. "On the corner there's a public call-box—"

Meantime Howson was dragging himself through five seconds of time slowed to the duration of an hour. I'm a doctor, he was thinking. I know all about lesions to the cerebellum—I have to. I know all about personality disturbances. But what the hell good is that to a guy leaking his life away on a hard kitchen floor?

They stood aside to let him pass, and he looked down with physical sight for the first time on something that was already too familiar to him. Rudi had literally and exactly committed *hara-kiri* (why? Because it's very, very efficient) with a common carving knife from the nearby table.

Now he was unconscious the blinding pain from his mind was easier to shut out. But the pain of his own helplessness was not. These people—these people!—were looking to him for help, advice, guidance . . .

He found his voice. "Anyone gone for that ambulance?"

A chorus assured him someone had.

"Good. Then get out of here. And shut the door. And if you can, keep quiet. Better yet, get the hell out of here—no, better not, in case the police get curious. Oh, *blast* the police! Go home!"

Clara was going to join the others, but he frowned and said nothing, and she heard him. Shyly she closed the door and came back to his side.

"Know anything about this sort of thing?" he said grimly.

"N-no. But I'll do anything you say. *Is* there anything we can do?"

"He will be dead in about five minutes unless we do something." Howson laughed without humour. "Only, you see, the joke is that I'm not a doctor of medicine. I never so much as dressed a cut finger in my life."

"Then—Oh, *God*. Poor stupid Rudi!"

"Not quite so bad as that. Do you know you're a receptive telepathist?"

The new shock, coming on top of the shock of seeing Rudi weltering in his blood, left her speechless. She could only shake her head in a mixture of disbelief and denial.

"Well, you are. And my doctor's degree happens to be in curative telepathy. There's one person in this room who knows—perhaps—what Rudi Allef needs to heal him. And that's Rudi Allef."

She tried to interrupt, but he rushed on, not bothering to use words now. *Deep in Rudi's brain, as in everyone's except mine, there's what we call body-image—the blueprint the body uses for its own repairs. I'm going after it. You will have to take from me instructions and carry them out. Don't try to think for yourself—just relax.*

And with that, he simultaneously reached deep into Rudi's failing mind and took over the control of Clara's hands. She struggled, but gamely tried to overcome her instinctive resistance, and within a minute she was lifting back Rudi's shoulders so they could see the gashed opening in his belly.

The sight shocked her so much Howson momentarily lost contact ; he spared a valuable second to reassure her, and then continued his exploration of Rudi's body image.

So many of his neurones were reporting damage and pain that he could not at first distinguish between them ; he decreased his sensitivity, but that only resulted in a vague blur.

He sat down on a chair and steeled himself. Then he began again.

This time it was as if the nerves were reporting their agony directly to himself, as if his own body were lying torn and ruined. But none of that must be relayed to Clara, or it would render her assistance useless. He had to absorb the pain himself . . .

All right, then. What first ? Stop the leakage of blood, for the activity of the brain was wasting away. Something—clips ? Hair-clips ? Women usually had something of the sort.

Clara had some. In a bowl. Only a foot from her shoulder. She seized them and furiously began to clip off the torn blood-vessels. The weakening of the brain diminished, remained steady at an irreducible trickle.

All right. Put back the displaced intestines.

Covered with blood, Clara's hands seized the grey-blue living guts and settled them tenderly in place ; stretched the mesenteries and restored them to their position ; and with each action came a reduction of the pain and damage reports from the neurones. By the time she had completed the replacement of the internal organs, Howson was able to open his eyes. He had not realised they were shut.

"An ordinary needle and thread," he said huskily, and she got them; she left bloody hand-prints on the table, on the door-handle, everywhere. "Stitch the stomach wall together," he directed, and she did, clumsily by surgical standards, but well enough. "Now the skin itself; now wash your hands and get a clean piece of cloth to dress it—"

Rudi's mind blazed up as he returned for an instant to consciousness, unexpectedly; Howson gritted his teeth and slapped the personality back into oblivion. Rough and ready treatment, but then, so much damage had already been done to Rudi's consciousness a little more would make no difference.

But the tiny flicker of life smouldered on. It would last, now, until a blood transfusion, and then they could repair the damage properly. Meantime, he would live, and that was all Howson could ask.

It had all taken exactly five minutes.

Now there would be police; questions; attempted suicide was probably a crime here—he seemed to remember it was. He would have to do something about that . . .

Clara came back from putting away the needle and thread, and stood silently looking down at her handiwork. "What did he have to try and kill himself for?" she said half-angrily, and Howson shook his head. He felt as tired as if he had walked a thousand miles, but he couldn't yield to weariness.

"He didn't kill himself, or even try to," he said. "He had an accident. It was stupid, but not criminal. A joke that went too far."

She saw all that was going on his mind, and nodded without him needing to explain further, but he had to explain when the ambulance at last arrived, and then when the police came, and after it all he was so exhausted he went to sleep in a chair where he sat down.

IX

When he awoke, he was for a long while puzzled as to where he could be. He lay on his back, between comfortable sheets, and a pillow was under his head. But the bed didn't have that slight ingenious bias which had been built into his own bed at the hospital in Ulan Bator, and which favoured his withered leg so subtly. More, the light played on the too-high ceiling in the wrong manner.

He came fully awake and turned on his side, and saw that Clara, wrapped in a dressing-gown, was dozing uneasily in the room's one arm-chair.

She probably sensed his awakening, and blinked her eyes open. She didn't say anything for a few moments. Then she smiled. "Feeling all right?" she asked banally. "You were so fast asleep you didn't even move when I put you to bed."

"You—put me to bed?"

"What did you expect me to do? Leave you on the floor?" She got to her feet and stretched. Then she took off the dressing-gown; she had pulled it on over the same shapeless sweater she had been wearing the evening before.

"But you shouldn't have done that," he protested. "I'd have been all right in that chair."

"Oh, shut up!" she said almost angrily. "You deserved a bed more than I did, by Christ. I don't want to argue about it—feel capable of breakfast?"

Howson sat up; he found she had taken off his shoes and jacket and left him otherwise fully dressed, so he pulled aside the bedclothes and got to the floor. "Well, you know—you know, I think I do."

She brought cereals and coffee and opened a can of fruit juice, and they sat eating off their knees on the edge of the unmade bed.

"What I want to know," said Clara after a while, "is how you managed to fob off the men from the hospital and the police with that phony story about an accident."

Howson dismissed it. "Look, if there's one thing a projective telepathist can do convincingly, it's tell a lie. I think I'd better fix the same sort of idea in the skull of the other people who were here—or could you rely on them to keep quiet?"

She considered. "I think so," she said at last.

"All right . . . But I wish I hadn't told them to clear out, after all. It was just that I was worried in case their presence, in their excited state, might distract me . . . Well, let it slide."

He put aside the bowl from which he had been eating. "I should have asked you before. How do you feel about being a telepathist yourself?"

The green eyes held a hint of uncertainty. "Then you meant what you said? I tried to—to receive something from you last

night, and nothing happened, so I guessed you'd just told me to give me confidence, or something," she finished lamely.

"You were probably just exhausted. But I did really mean what I said. Tell me something: how did you know what Rudi had done?"

"Why, he—he screamed!"

"He didn't utter a sound. He might have been a Samurai, the way he did it. If he *had* screamed, everyone in the room would have heard. Only you and I knew what had happened, and that means you're a receptive telepathist. I'd already begun to suspect you might be; I'm surprised you hadn't done so yourself."

She finished eating and lit a cigarette. "Oh, this is all so—disturbing! I mean, I'd always thought of telepathists as people sort of—you know, *apart*."

"They are," said Howson with quiet grimness.

"And I didn't even know there were—what do you call them?—receptive ones?"

"Rather few, as a matter of fact. I've met—oh, a dozen or so, I suppose. But you're about the right age for the talent to develop, you know. I was twenty-two when they discovered me. As a matter of fact, I suspect there are probably a lot more receptive telepathists than we know about—I mean, you can spot a projective telepathist just by walking down the street a mile from him, if he's reasonably powerful and totally untrained—he stands out like a fire alarm! But how do you spot a receptive one, unless something happens to identify him—or her—beyond doubt? However . . . Now you know about yourself, what do you propose to do?"

"I—don't know." She looked rather frightened. "I haven't even had time to think out how I'm going to tell my family."

"That was a problem I never had to face," said Howson, grimly. "Do your family have—uh—prejudices, then?"

"I don't really know. I'm afraid they might have. After all, being a telepathist is something pretty special, isn't it? And it sort of limits you to a few professions where you can make use of it?" A thought creased her brow. "I meant to ask—what the hell do receptive telepathists *do*, anyway?"

Howson shrugged. "Every new case opens up a new possibility. But I can tell you of one or two jobs I know: psychiatric diagnostician, therapy watchdog—"

"What?"

"Therapy watchdog. I've often worked with one. If the curative telepathist wants to report progress on a case while going along, without breaking his linkage with the patient, he has one of the watchdogs sit in on the case and give verbal account of it to the doctors in charge. Then there's Olaf Marks, who's the world's *only* genius-spotter—his business is to discover outstandingly brilliant children in the pre-verbal stage. Fortunately, he loves kids. And Danny Waldemar is also a spotter, only he tours the world looking for projective telepathists—he found me, in fact, right here in this city. And there's Makerakera, who's another of these 'world's only' types: a sort of peacemaker's mate, who's recognised by the United Nations as an authority on aggression and spends his time nipping impending warfare in the bud. Oh, there's no need to worry about choice of a job. We telepathists are near enough unique to be able to manufacture our own."

She gave a little nervous laugh. "It's funny to hear you say 'we telepathists' and know you're including me. I wish, though, I had projective ability if I had anything at all—then I wouldn't need to worry about my family's reactions . . . Still, what you say is quite reassuring."

"It's the truth. You know, you wouldn't be happy doing anything else once your talent developed fully. You'd be like a sighted man trying to confine himself to working in an unlit cellar." Howson sighed. "Lord knows, though, to be a telepath poses its own problems . . . You were right about me, last night, of course."

"More—more receptive telepathy?"

"What do *you* think?"

She got up and began clearing away the breakfast dishes without answering. After an interval of silence, she said, "How about Rudi, Gerry? Did you have a chance to find out what made him do it?"

"No. One has to learn not to intrude on another mind's privacy. One *has* to, or life wouldn't be worth living. And while we were patching him up, of course, I couldn't waste time. You've had a much better chance to find out why he did it."

She made a helpless gesture. "All I knew was that he was acting. Living a lie, as they say. Doing it well, *but* . . .

Gerry, what exactly are you doing in this town, anyway? Looking up old acquaintances, or something?"

"I looked up a couple. That was a failure. No, I'm after new acquaintances rather than old ones. I suppose you might say I was on holiday, though it's more of a voyage of self-discovery . . . You'll find out what I mean some day."

Clara accepted the hint. "So—what should I do now, to get back to my own worries?" She smiled faintly.

"Officially, you ought to drop by at the local World Health Organisation office and they'd fly you to Ulan Bator or Canberra or perhaps Hong Kong for testing and training. I'd say, get used to the idea before you report in."

"You seem awfully certain that I will report in—and yet I'm sure you wouldn't announce my existence if I asked you not to."

"Of course I wouldn't. Only after a while you'll get dissatisfied with your own incompetence; you'll get frustrated by things you don't know how to handle. Then one day you'll say, 'Ah, the hell with it,' and go and ask to learn how to use your gift properly." He shrugged. "It wasn't telepathists who worked out the techniques for using it, you know—it was ordinary psychologists who could no more project an impression than ride a bicycle to the moon. And now I want you to do me a favour. Go to the phone and call the hospital where they took Rudi—it's the Main General, and he'll be in Queen's Ward, probably under sedation still. Ask if we can—I'm sorry. Are you busy this morning?"

She shook her head.

"Then ask if we, if you want to come, can see him. Give them my name, Gerald Howson, and tell them I'm Psi.D., Ulan Bator. They'll fall over themselves to let us come."

"Then why bother to call them up first?"

Howson looked at her steadily. "I want them to have a chance to learn that I'm a lame dwarf instead of a husky superman," he said calmly. "It—hurts me less that way."

Clara looked away. "That was tactless of me," she said.

"Yes," said Howson, and got up. "I'll make myself smart while you go and call the hospital."

X

Rudi Allef lay in his hospital bed with a cradle keeping the bedding off his injured abdomen. He was not unconscious, but he was chiefly aware of pain. The sedatives he had been given had reduced it to the level of a raging headache, which enabled him for short periods to sidestep it inside his mind and think coherently, but most of the time the effort simply did not seem worthwhile.

When Howson came to him, he lay unmoving with his eyes tightly shut.

The hospital was very much the same as any other hospital and Howson of course was used to these surroundings. The hardly veiled deference with which he, as a Psi.D., Ulan Bator, was treated was the thing which most frequently reminded him that he was actually a stranger here. It seemed that about half the staff wanted to accompany him to the patient's bed, but he showed temper for the first time in many months, and refused to permit anyone but the surgeon who had operated and the nurse in charge to come with him. And Clara, naturally.

Howson could tell she was uncomfortable ; now that she knew of her gift, she was more able to receive the impressions it gave her, and she had not yet learned when in a hospital to concentrate on the undercurrent of healing beneath the ever-present sensations of pain. Out of momentary sympathy, and in memory of his own beginnings, he loaned her self-confidence with his mind.

They came into the ward, and screens were drawn around the bed where Rudi lay. A rubber pipe was taped to his arm ; he would have been given several transfusions to build up his diminished blood supply.

Howson stepped between the screens, and the nurse drew them close behind the party. There was a chair there already ; awkwardly, because it was a full sized chair, Howson scrambled on to it and peered into Rudi's mind.

Meantime he spoke in words to the surgeon, saying, " What sort of state was he in ? "

" Bad," said the surgeon, a straight-bodied woman of forty. " He would have been dead if it hadn't been for the first-aid he received. It was just as well you were there, Dr. Howson—though I didn't know curative telepathists ever had a full-scale medical course."

"They don't," said Howson. And repeated, "I'd never even so much as bandaged a cut finger before."

He could feel the resentment hardening in her as the words sank in : it meant, "Not only is this little cripple possessed of powers superior to mine—he can do my job for me without training, without difficulty, and boast about his success . . ."

"That's hardly a fair thought," he said, not realising he had said it. "I'm sorry. But it's not, you know."

Clara, who had been listening with puzzlement, interrupted unexpectedly. "You should have seen what it cost him ! The pain he must have—"

Clara ! The single warning thought cut off her hasty words.

"All right," he said aloud. "May I have silence, please ?"

Rudi . . .

The figure on the bed stirred very slightly. That was all the others could see. Inside his mind, Rudi was saying, "What do you want, you interfering bastard ?"

I saved your life, Rudi.

For what ? For pain like this ? You condemned me to it when you interfered and stopped me doing what I wanted to do.

I know. Howson had said last night to Clara that a projective telepathist could tell a lie convincingly ; now he summoned up all his reserves to prove the corollary—that he could equally convincingly tell the truth.

I know, Rudi. I can feel that pain as much as you, you know. I'm fully aware of what I've caused you. Now I have to give you something in return—happiness, maybe, or satisfaction, whatever you want that I can let you have. Otherwise how would my conscience treat me ?

The whole mind was involved in this ; behind the verbalised projection, smoothly, automatically in spite of his agony, Howson fed in a reflection of Rudi's suffering, filtered through his own mind, impressed with his own personality.

A feeble flicker of disbelief : *But you're nothing to me. We're strangers ; we met by chance and might have been a thousand miles apart today if it hadn't been for what I did.*

Nobody is nothing to one of us. And behind that, because it was too complex to put into words, Howson made himself consciously feel what was usually so much a part of himself that he never gave it a thought—the shared quality of a telepathist's existence, the need and hunger and yearning which were all the ordinary individual's needs and hungers and

yearnings a million-fold multiplied, as if in a hall of mirrors by reflections re-doubling and re-doubling themselves away towards infinity.

That was why a telepathist became a peacemaker, or a psychiatrist, or a curative telepathist, or an industrial disputes arbitrator—all *helping* jobs, helping people to be happier or better off or more fulfilled. It was also why he had told splendid glamorous telepathic stories to the deaf-and-dumb girl he now knew as Mary Williams, and why he had been so bitterly disappointed when he learned that his youthful fumbling attempt to give her happiness had turned into a Greek gift.

It was also why (though normal people could never quite accept that fact unless they had been shown by someone such as Howson) there would never be a telepathist who would be antisocial, who would be a master criminal or general of an army. No telepathist could ever have stood in the place of Chaka Zulu and ordered his hordes to ravage a season's journey in the direction he had cast his spear ; no telepathist could ever have ordered his fellow beings to Belson ; no telepathist could ever have dropped the atomic bomb at Hiroshima or Nagasaki.

It was also the naked truth.

Rudi's eyes flickered open, and he looked at the vacant face masking the keen mind. Last night, when they first met, he had ignored the conventional reaction to Howson's small stature, deformity, unprepossessing appearance—but because on principle he ignored the conventions which demanded the reactions. He was half-Israeli ; perhaps his people had a legacy of conventional prejudices enough to last them for eternity—all directed against them. So, by analogy, he would have leaned over backwards to avoid offending a negro. So do and have long done millions of people ; only most of them, if they fail to learn the logic of prejudice, learn the logic of self-interest and therefore conform. Rudi, now, would not.

He yielded ; it was easy to yield and go back into his fog of pain. For Howson, it was very hard, but it had to be done—and he had done it very often in the past.

Why did you do it, Rudi ?

A complex picture of dissatisfaction with the work he had set himself to do ; with the reception it had had ; with the inability of other people to understand what he was doing.

Add to that : money troubles, because of the stopping of his grant ; emotional problems on a personal level—he needed the affection and acceptance of a woman, any woman, but she must understand his needs—he was good-looking and pleasant, but that was not enough to secure him the right person. He had tried many ; the last had been cruel. And the mask he had put up to protect himself against the scrutiny of the world had proved his undoing—people who could not penetrate it, and therefore had no idea of the turmoil of sorrow boiling in his brain, had been tactless, unkind, re-opening old sores unknowingly.

So he had picked up a knife, and thought how much he would like oblivion.

But Howson could see behind the mask, and therefore would not be tactless and unkind ; he understood Rudi's needs, and could help and advise him. Money troubles—Howson dismissed them with a sudden gesture of annoyance, vividly pictured in his mind. In the same instant he went straight ahead to the factor which all through Rudi's bitter survey of his reasons for suicide had taken the foremost place : his work.

What work is this ?

Chaos, mingled with striving. Behind it all, very deep, was a need to create and bring forth—Howson found it amazingly feminine, much reminiscent of certain urges he had known in the deep unconscious of frustrated single women. From this sprang in unity several consequences ; he saw them presented to him all at once, but had to verbalise them in sequence.

Though feminine, this impulse was also essentially human. It had byproducts which he at once noticed and dismissed—such as that the reason for the agony in Rudi's creative activity was that his deep unconscious saw it as parutrition, and that brings pain, and that the reason why he chose to attempt suicide by hara-kiri was because it represented a Caesarian delivery on the cross-reference identity level of his mind.

But Rudi's deep unconscious could only inform the probing inquisitorial mind why he needed to create at all ; it could not explain the nature of the creation and the way in which Rudi was tackling it. Howson drew back, dizzying for a moment as he discovered his own body to be cramped and stiff. No matter ; he usually worked on a bed, attended by a nurse and watched over as anxiously as the patient, for he was nearly oblivious of himself when he was probing deeply. Naturally he was uncomfortable here.

"There's too much pain," he told the surgeon shortly. "Would it be safe for him to get a local in the stomach wall?"

Then he focused his physical vision, and found that the nurse had already lifted up the bedclothes and was preparing an injection. He looked blank, and then, struck by a sudden thought, turned to Clara, who stood white-faced holding the bar at the foot of the bed.

She read the question before he could utter it, and nodded. "You . . . you told me about therapy watchdogs. I've already asked for him to be given an anaesthetic."

Howson felt a deep wave of appreciation and gratitude ; he did not check it, but projected it as it stood, and Clara flushed with sudden embarrassment.

How do you feel ?

Oh, Gerry—it's magnificent, but it's somehow absolutely terrifying at the same time !

Howson hesitated for a moment, and then, as if confessing a serious error of judgment, he said in words, "You know, I might have been wrong last night. Maybe you won't have to report in and ask to be taught how to use your gift properly."

The nurse and the surgeon exchanged puzzled glances at this sudden illogical dialogue.

"But"—Clara seemed just as astonished—"but *you're* teaching me ! You're teaching me all the time !"

The nurse gently touched Rudi's bandaged abdomen ; he did not wince or cry out. "The local's taken effect, Dr. Howson," she said quietly.

"Fine."

Rudi !

Yes . . . ? A pure conscious note of interrogation, blended with assent and willingness to co-operate.

And Howson settled down to find clarity and order in something that was not clear to Rudi himself.

Springing from the fundamental creative urge were the reasons why this urge could not find an outlet in writing, painting, sculpture, or anything else where the creator was divorced from his audience. Rudi could never be satisfied to create something and leave other people, elsewhere, to appreciate it. That same appreciation fed and renewed his desire to create, as an actor feeds on a "good audience" and rises to new interpretative heights.

And yet acting, again, would be inadequate for Rudi, because it was interpretative. So was ballet ; so was almost every other form of art in which there was the direct audience contact Rudi craved—although he had been a first-class debater, conjuring up splendid impromptu speeches. (Howson had to sift through a dozen such qualifications and explanations before he arrived at a clear picture of what Rudi actually was trying to do).

Essentially, though, it was music which attracted him most. And—

And Howson found himself on the top of a dizzying slide, lost his footing, and went headlong skidding and slipping into a vast uncharted jungle of interlocked sensory experiences.

Rudi Allef's mind was almost as far from the normal as was Howson's own, but in a different direction ; somehow, Rudi's sense-data cross-referred, interchangeably. Howson had trespassed in minds with a limited sort of audio-vision—those of people to whom musical sounds called up associated memories of colours or pictures—but compared to what went on in Rudi's mind that was puerile.

(Once, long before, Howson had seen a tattered and scratched print of Disney's *Fantasia* ; he had enjoyed it, and had wished that there had been more attempts to combine sound and vision in a similar way. Now he was finding out what the combination could be like on the highest level).

Like a swimmer struggling in a torrential river, Howson felt wildly for solidity in this roaring stream of memory. Images presented themselves : a voice/velvet/a kitten's claws scratching /purple/ripe fruit—a ship's siren/fog/steel/yellowish-grey/cold /insecurity/sense of loss and emptiness—a common chord of C major struck on a piano/childhood/wood/black and white overlaid with bright gold/security/hate/something burning/tightness about the forehead/shame/stiffness in the wrists/liquidity/roundness . . .

There was virtually no end to that one. Howson drew back a little and tried again.

He was walking through a forest of ferns a hundred feet high with gigantic animals browsing off their bark ; he was rather tired, as if he had walked a long way, and the sun was extremely hot. But he came to a blue river and became an ice-floe bobbing on a gentle current, melting slowly into the water around. He/the water plunged over a precipice ; the pain of

striking rock after rock in the long descent was somehow satisfying and fulfilling, because he was standing back watching the white spray as he flowed down and there was solidity slowly being worn away as the water eroded the underlying rocks and the spray diffused out with vastness and blackness and far down below a sensation of warmth and redness not seen but imagined (infra-redness ?) as though he was on an airless world with a red sun, a giant red sun, crawling over the horizon to turn into something scuttering and four-legged on an endless black plain which was only a few feet across and around which giants, unheeding, went about their business with bass footsteps and bass voices—

Only all the time he was listening to an orchestra.

Howson felt very tired. Someone was slapping his face gently with a towel dipped in ice-water. He opened his eyes, and found he was still on the chair in the ward.

"Are you all right?" said Clara, looking anxiously over the shoulder of the nurse who was holding the wet towel. "You—you were frightened—?"

Howson waited to reply until he had got used to being back inside his own mind. "How long was I—away?" he said in a hoarse voice.

"It's been nearly three hours," said the woman surgeon glancing at her watch.

"Less than I thought—still, you were right to pull me back, I suppose." Howson got gingerly to his feet and took a step to ease the pins-and-needles in his legs. He glanced at Clara.

What did you get?

I don't quite know . . . There was a lot of fear.

Your own. Howson frowned. Something was puzzling him. Still, it would come clear soon enough—perhaps. He spoke aloud to the surgeon.

"Thank you for letting me study the case. It's very interesting. I'm afraid I may have put a strain on him—would you check how well he stood it, and let me know how soon you think he'll be able to take full-scale therapy?"

"Are you proposing to handle the case—here?" said the surgeon. She didn't know whether to be flattered that a curative telepathist of such renown should want to work in her hospital, or annoyed that an outsider should intrude on one of her cases. Flattery struggled hard, and won; Howson made gently certain of that.

She checked Rudi thoroughly and swiftly. "Pulse strong," she muttered; "blood-pressure—we-ell, not too bad. Respiration fair . . ." She rolled back an eyelid and flashed a torch into the pupil beneath. "Yes, Dr. Howson, he's not suffered from what you did. He should be strong enough for you in—well, at a fair guess, a week or ten days."

Howson felt disappointed; there was something in Rudi's mind which he needed. In any case, he was fascinated by the resources he had discovered there. How to contain himself during the next week—?

Well, that would have to take care of itself.

XI

He and Clara sat in a restaurant near the hospital, spending time over lengthy conversation and a second cup of coffee. He had been sorting out his memories of Rudi's mind, and putting them up clearly and in order so that she could appreciate his trouble. But the prolonged strain had misted her mind, so they had gone back to words.

"Poor Rudi," Clara said, absently stirring her empty cup. "No wonder he was so frustrated . . . How could he ever hope to communicate with an audience?"

"Oh, he realises, I think, that no one else shares precisely his associations of one sensation with another. I mean, a telepathist is the only conceivable ideal audience for him. Consciously, he'd be satisfied if he could create—objectively—a passable facsimile of his mental images, to which his listeners could add their own associations. What he can't realise, can't reconcile himself to, is that hardly anyone else in the world can perform such feats of mental association as he can.

"Let's imagine a concrete example. You've mentioned his refusal to co-operate with the university authorities. Presumably he was doing experimental composition?"

Clara nodded. "Some of it was really weird! But the main trouble was that he enlisted Jay Horne's support—you remember meeting Jay? Of course you do—anyway, he was as they said 'interfering' with Jay's own work, which is rather more appreciated and more readily accessible, because he spent so much time helping Rudi out. At least, so I've heard from Charma Horne—I've known her longer than Jay. Sorry—go on."

"Why apologise? Rudi produces an experimental work; the logic behind it is probably that of his own associations with the sounds it involves. He would be satisfied with *some* comprehension on the part of the listener; instead, his audience listens only for the sake of the sounds themselves, thus missing the whole point of the work. His hopes dwindle; he gets more and more helpless even when he deliberately restricts the range of associations on which he bases his music, and as he approaches nearer to the conventional, he more and more feels that he is drifting away from what he wants—more: needs—to do.

"If he enlists Jay's help, it's because he has restricted himself almost to the barest minimum. Discarding all the other sensory cross-references he himself experiences, he thinks he might as well convey plain images of colour and movement if all else fails. Right? The description he gave me of Jay's work made me feel that he doesn't regard it too highly."

"He does, though. He doesn't regard Jay himself too highly, and that's quite a different matter."

"I see," Howson mused. "But the difficulty which one always runs up against in every attempt to integrate music and visual impressions is that it's expensive, complicated and generally unsatisfactory. What one needs is an instrument as simple and versatile as a piano, which combines the resources of a colour-organ with those of an unlimited film library."

Clara stared at him. "Do you know, those are almost exactly the words Charma once used to me when things were going badly between Rudi and Jay?"

"Not surprising. Probably they were the ones Rudi himself used." Howson stared into space. "Clara, let's go and call on the Hornes. There are things I ought to know before I start on Rudi's therapy."

"You said," Clara reminded him timidly, "that you were on holiday . . .?"

"A man at Ulan Bator hospital asked me why I didn't use my talents for my own enjoyment," said Howson with a hint of bitterness. "So that's just what I'm proposing to do. I can't deny that I look forward to seeing Rudi Allef thank me for what I've done for him. Only I've *got* to find something I *can* do for him. Let's go."

They went; and found Charma and Jay at home, in a small apartment near the university. Plainer than ever in a once-red

blouse and house-shorts, Charma was attempting to cope with the housework and Jay's furious complaints that she was disturbing a whole lot of his necessary equipment at the same time ; Howson could sense the raised tempers from outside the door. However, he knocked and they entered, and the row dissolved into greetings.

When they had cleared a couple of chairs and Charma had conjured a pot of coffee out of the wrecked-looking kitchenette, Howson realised that he could detect a harmony of attitudes between the couple, which underlay and supported their superficial eternal disagreement. It rather took him aback, but evidently they had a thoroughly workable arrangement . . .

He repressed the desire to probe further and stated the purpose of their visit. It wasn't until he had almost finished that he realised neither Jay nor Charma knew who he really was. He explained, wondering what the reaction would be.

"Good—*grief* !" said Jay, his mild blue eyes growing round with astonishment. "Talk about angels unawares ! When I think where poor old Rudi would be now, if it hadn't been for you—! Thanks, Dr. Howson. I think that man is going places, in spite of the fact that he gets on my nerves."

"Call me Gerry," said Howson, relieved beyond measure. "Anyway—I was hoping to see something of what Rudi had been doing."

"*That's* easy enough. Charma honey, suppose you clear the piano and get out that thing we were looking at yesterday, and I'll turn on the gadgets."

At one side of the small, crowded room, there stood the piano ; Howson hadn't noticed it for the tangle of electrical and other equipment overhanging it. When Charma cleared it off, he saw it was not quite an ordinary piano : it had two additional keyboards, one belonging to an organ-simulator and the other to a battery of strips of tape each with a separate playing head.

"That's for special effects," explained Jay as he went from point to point in the room turning switches. "Rudi is hell on that kind of thing. Now here's my own particular pet." And he took the wooden lid off a large glass box like an aquarium, at the bottom of which a pool of luminescent fluid gleamed faintly. A row of coloured lights shown down each side of the tank.

"Lights down," said Jay as he took his place at a haywire panel of electrical controls. There was darkness as Charma

hauled the curtains across the window, in which the green of the luminescent liquid shone eerily.

"Watch the tank," said Jay briefly. "Okay, honey—one, two, three—"

A succession of irregular intervals down the keyboard, ending in a swelling imitation of a peal of bells from one of the special keys, and shapes began to form in the glass tank: multi-coloured, responding vaguely and slowly to the music. Within a few seconds they were growing definite, and hard square forms followed hard square chords.

Watching intently, Howson thought he could see a vague, distorted resemblance to certain things he had seen in Rudi's mind, but how hollow, how rudimentary this makeshift was compared to the vivid, far-reaching volumes of association he had seen there!

The music stopped abruptly. "That's as far as we got with that one," said Jay coolly. "Open the curtains, there's a dear."

And as Charma flung them wide, he looked at Howson. He raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"It's clever," said Howson. "But it's rather shallow."

Jay looked delighted. "Precisely what I've been saying. I've gone along with almost everything Rudi has asked me to do, because as I said I think he's going places. But I have to admit that he's taken up a hell of a lot of my time, and we don't seem to be very happy collaborators. If you'll come into the other room, I'll show you what I've been doing myself."

In the other room there were dozens of the glass tanks ranged on shelves, some of them dusty, all of them dark and uninteresting. Jay went to an electric point and plugged in a wandering lead.

"This is my latest," he said, and connected the lead to a socket beneath one of the larger glass tanks. A faint light came on; after a pause, it brightened, and a stream of opalescent bubbles began to work their way through the tank in a switch-back formation. Shafts of green, yellow and blue shifted through the tank in an irregular series of graceful loops; then, suddenly, a square and uncompromising formation in bright red loomed up from a point till it almost filled the side of the tank nearest to the watchers. It vanished; the graceful swerving curves continued.

"It never repeats itself," said Jay thoughtfully. "It's like a kaleidoscope—in fact, I suppose that's what it most closely resembles."

"It's much more successful than what you've been doing with Rudi," said Howson. "But equally it's more limited."

Jay connected another of the tanks; this one was darker, dark red, midnight blue and purple shot with heavy gold and rare flashes of white. Watching it, he nodded. "And yet this is what I'm trying to do," he said. "I'm after something quite simple: I just want to convey movement and colour in a—well, in a beautiful combination. Or an ugly one, come to that. Like this!" He snapped a switch, and a third tank lit—hesitantly moving, abrupt in its changes of colour, the whole pattern dissolving frequently into muddy brown and a sickly olive-grey.

"But you see," Jay continued, "I know what I'm after. Sometimes I get the impression Rudi didn't. I mean, I'd follow his instructions to the letter, spending hours over a single effect, and then have him go through the roof because it wasn't quite what he wanted."

"I'm not surprised," said Howson thoughtfully. "You see, Rudi's sensory impressions are so completely interlocked I doubt if he could possibly visualise anything straightforwardly. He hears a note struck on your piano, and he immediately links it up with—oh, let's say the taste and texture of a slice of bread, the colour of a stormy sky, and the smell of stagnant water, together with a bodily sensation of anxiety and pins-and-needles in the left arm. All those interlock with still other ideas—result, chaos! He probably can't single out the most important items; he can't separate the colour of the sky from the colour of the greenish weed on the water or the bread-colour of the bread. He mingles them all in his mind, but no one else could possibly take them all in simultaneously and achieve the same associations and overtones that he gets."

"Except you," said Clara.

"Yes," said Howson thoughtfully. "Except me . . . or another telepath. Jay, what are the resources of that thing of yours in the room where we were just now?"

"That's hard to say," Jay answered. "Aside from the obvious limits imposed by the speed of response—and its small size, of course—pretty well limitless. We've worked on it on and off for more than a year now."

"Could you spare a little time to work on it further?" Howson noted the momentary hesitation with which Jay responded, and added quickly, "It's for Rudi."

"Okay," said Jay. "What exactly do you want?"

"Well . . . Look, I agree with you that Rudi is going places. His ability to correlate and cross-refer sensory data means that he could, given the right opportunity, create his new art-form. Given a life-time at it, and public interest, he could call on everything he needs to convey the totality of impressions he's after. I mean, he could eventually obtain equipment to integrate sight, sound, smell, maybe even more complex impressions. What he needs now is *hope*. And I have an idea how we might give him that."

XII

Rudi !

Howson felt the mind shrink a little and then remember. The healing was progressing well ; Howson felt a stir of envy at the normality of Rudi's bodily functions compare with his own. He could never have stood an injury a tenth as bad as that which the younger man had sustained and would recover from.

They had moved Rudi into a private sound-proof room, and now they were all here : Jay, Charma and Clara, with a nurse standing by. Howson renewed his approach gently.

Rudi, think of your music.

As if floodgates had been opened, a wave of imagined sound poured into Rudi's aching consciousness ; Howson fought to channel and control it. He gained the minimal amount he needed, and nodded to Clara.

The tank—which had taken four men to bring it into the ward—lit ; Clara, a strained look on her face, flashed the controls, and Howson suggested that Rudi open his eyes. He did ; he saw—

Jay and Charma, of course, could not hear the music that pulsed and raged in Rudi's mind. But Howson could, and so could Clara, and that was what mattered.

They had spent the week experimenting, improving, and training : now the tank could respond to virtually anything, and they had jury-rigged new controls until it was as versatile and essentially as simple as a theremin. And Clara—

Howson had wondered sometimes in the course of the past week whether it was just that she was a ready subject, or that

he himself should have been an instructor of telepathy, for she was reading Rudi's fantastic mental projections, sifting them out and extracting the essentials, *and* converting them into visual images, as fast as Rudi himself could think them.

Awed amazement grew plain on Rudi's face as he watched the tank. Jay and Charma, who could not hear the music to which Clara was responding, were almost as startled. And Howson felt purely and simply overjoyed.

Mountains grew in the tank, distorted as if looked at from below, purple-blue and overpowering; mists gathered round their peaks, and an avalanche thundered into a valley surrounded by white sprays of snow, as a distant and melancholy horn theme dissolved in Rudi's mind into a cataclysm of orchestral sounds and a hundred un-musical noises. The tank blurred; a wisp of smoke rose from a connection leading to it, and Jay leapt forward with an exclamation.

It was over.

Hoping that the disappointment had not outweighed the pleasure in Rudi's mind, Howson turned to the bed. His hope was fulfilled; Rudi was struggling to sit up, his face radiant with delight.

Howson cut across his incoherent babble of thanks with a calming thought. "You don't need to thank *me*," he said with a twisted smile. "I can tell easily enough that you're grateful. You were stupid to think of giving up when there was success within your grasp, weren't you?"

"But it wasn't," said Rudi. "It was within yours! If it hadn't been for you—! And Clara, of course. But — but damnation, this isn't success, if I have to rely on you to help me."

"Rely on me?" Howson was genuinely astonished. "Oh, of course! I suppose you think I was projecting your images to Clara." Succinctly he explained what had actually happened. Relief grew plain in Rudi's face, but soon enough a further thought struck him.

"But—Clara, how do you feel about this? You won't want to go on being an interpreter for me, surely."

"I won't have to. Gerry says that when people get to know about what we two can do together, it will excite them enough for you to be given orchestras to work with. Then all you need to do is to learn to control this thing—we've worked out such

a simple way of running it that even I can manage it now. Only you'll be able to have bigger and better gadgets—"

She looked appealingly at Howson, who obliged by projecting the future he envisaged for Rudi's work directly into his mind.

There was a hall—vast ; in darkness. At the far end lights glowed over music stands, and there was rustling and tuning up to be heard. Stillness : broken by the opening bars of Rudi's composition. Darkness : interrupted by the creation in a huge counterpart of Jay's yard-square tank of vivid, fluid, pictorial, corresponding images. The response in the audience could be felt, grew tangible in the air, and in answer the images fed on the appreciation.

He finished, and found Rudi with his eyes closed and his hands clasped together on the coverlet. Howson got to his feet and beckoned his companions ; stealthily they crept from the room, leaving Rudi with the vision of his ambition fulfilled.

Later they sat in Jay and Charma's apartment drinking wine in celebration of their success. " You—you didn't exaggerate at all, did you, Gerry ?" Clara asked timidly when they had toasted him half a dozen times.

" Not greatly. Oh, perhaps a little—I mean, the sort of world-wide appreciation I promised him may take twenty years to come. But it damned well should come ; Rudi has a gift in its way as unusual as yours or mine. I'm sorry, you two," he added to Jay and Charma.

Jay shrugged. " We should worry. I'd not deny I'd like to have something special, as you two have—but hell, you must have had a lot to put up with in exchange. I think I shall be a sort of success in my own way, and I doubt if I'll have the heartaches which Rudi or yourselves will have to stand."

" Probably not," said Howson thoughtfully. " You know, I've been giving the matter a little consideration, and I think I could open up a market for as many of your fluid mobiles as you care to build. They have a certain restful fascination about them which I like . . . Suppose I was to recommend you to the director of my hospital, and got him interested in the idea of trying them in place of the standard mobiles and tanks of tropical fish we use in the mental wards, you wouldn't think that was demeaning to your art, would you ?"

"Good heavens no," said Jay, staring. "What do you think I make myself out to be—another Michelangelo or something? I'm a sort of glorified interior decorator, is all."

"And even if he did make himself out to be a genius," said Charma with mock grimness, "I'd soon see he was cured of the idea. Thanks a million, Gerry—that'll take us off the bread-line!"

Then she looked directly at Howson. "What about you?"

"What about me? Well . . . Rudi, so to speak, has given his first public performance"—Howson grinned to himself; he was looking forward to this moment, and had had trouble containing himself so long already—"so I think maybe I might now give mine."

He reached out gently with his mind, and began to tell a story—as he had told a story to Mary Williams, so long ago, and as he had done to Mary's children just the other day.

How could he have been so blind? How could he have failed to realise that here, under his nose, was the way in which he could use his gift not only for his own but for others' enjoyment?

So he conjured up a simple fantasy, a fairy-tale, with sights, sounds, smells, tactile sensations, emotions—all drawn from the vast store of unreal and real memories with which his intimate knowledge of so many other minds than his own had armed him. It was an experiment only, of course—a trial run. One day there would be something more. But for now, this was enough.

His audience came slowly back to reality, their eyes shining, and he knew he had won.

And now—?

Maybe a trip around the world, to add a knowledge of reality to his knowledge of people's dreams and nightmares and imaginings, drawing here a little and there a little from the consciousness of Asians, Europeans, Americans, Australasians . . . The whole world suddenly lay open to him.

He smiled, and poured himself another drink.

As usual, the stadium had been packed to capacity. The very rarity of the occasions on which Gerald Howson invited people to hear him "thinking aloud" ensured that all available accommodation went as soon as it was advertised—he never allowed it to conflict with his work at the Ulan Bator hospital. But whenever he got the opportunity, he would notify some

city or town, and people would travel a thousand miles if they could manage it. It was amazing how his reputation had grown in two years.

Now they were wistfully filing from the stadium, and Howson was receiving—and largely ignoring—his inevitable wave of congratulations from important listeners. As always, he had to deny that he must be feeling tired after his efforts—possibly he could take to adding as a coda to the performance the fact that he did this at least in part to refresh himself after a period of work. It was perfectly true—he never felt so unweary or so happy as after one of these rare public appearances.

Tonight he had skipped from idea to idea, now telling his audience of his work, now telling them of the thoughts of a crippled dwarf, now those of a normal happy person, in India, in Venezuela, in Italy, in many other places where he had garnered his material. It was by now a virtuoso achievement—often he improvised on the reactions of the members of the audience, leaving those who were lonely and unhappy proud to have been noticed and singled out.

"Gerry," said Pandit Singh softly through the babble of congratulation which welled from the people surrounding him. "Gerry, there's someone here whom you ought to see."

Hullo, Rudi—I knew you were there. Just give me time to get rid of these so-and-so's !

A quiet suggestion that the uninvited intruders should take their leave, and he was free to come and shake Rudi's hand. Clara was with him, and he greeted her affectionately.

How are you ?

Fine ! You'll be seeing a lot of me from now on—I start training as a therapy watchdog in Ulan Bator next month.

Delight !

"Hullo, Gerry," said Rudi, unaware of this mental exchange. He seemed almost embarrassed. "You were wonderful."

"I know," said Howson, smiling ; Rudi could hardly recognise him as the same man, so greatly had he grown in self-assurance. "When are you going to join me in show business ?"

"I'm giving my first performance in a few weeks. Mainly, I came to invite you and make sure you can be there. If you can't, I'll postpone it till you can."

"Congratulations ; you can be sure I'll come. My work permitting."

Rudi looked at Pandit Singh standing on his left ; a slight flush coloured his cheekbones. "Gerry—I've been talking with Dr. Singh here, about you, and I've been finding out quite a lot about your—uh—about your disability. I don't know much about either medicine or telepathy, but as I understand it, the trouble is that some part of your brain which ought to look after the—well, the repair and upkeep of your body—it's been sacrificed to your telepathic organ."

"Roughly," said Howson ; he searched Rudi's face keenly, but refrained from forestalling his next words by intruding on his mind.

"Well—what I was thinking was . . . you can transfer practically anything else from another person's mind to your own—couldn't you sort of borrow the necessary part of *my* mind to make up for what you haven't got?" The last part came in a rush, and Rudi looked at once hopeful and excited. "You see, I owe you everything, including my life, and I'd like to do something equally valuable in return—"

Howson shut his eyes ; the world seemed to be spinning around him. Pandit Singh spoke up into the gap.

"I've talked it over with Mr. Allef," he said smoothly, "and I don't see any reason why it shouldn't be done. It would, of course, mean that your bodily appearance would be something rather like his, but it would also mean that we could have you operated on with an excellent chance of successful healing. It might even mean you growing in height. I've explained all the consequences to Mr. Allef, and told him it would mean lying in a hospital bed for as long as was required, unable to do anything and suffering as much as if he himself had been operated on—"

"And I still insist on being allowed to do it," said Rudi firmly.

Howson knew he could do nothing else but accept—but even as he uttered the grateful words, he felt that it was unnecessary, because in the moment of Rudi making the offer, he, Gerald Howson, had become a whole man.

—John Brunner

N U L O O K

BY JOHN RACKHAM

Here is a modern and novel version of the alchemist searching for the transmutation of elements—the eternal hunt for the ‘pot of gold at the rainbow’s end.’ John Rackham’s elixir would doubtless be very useful to the “head-shrinkers” too—the South American variety !

You know the old saws, about hate being akin to love, the hair-line between laughter and tears, and so forth ? Strange, isn’t it, that the same thing applies to luck ? Does with me, anyway. I’m one of those people who are forever unlucky, although surrounded by chances that would take anyone else right up there alongside Nuffield, or Rockefeller. I’ve been a lot of things, one way and another ; dabbled in electronics, engineering, hypnotherapy, experimental chemistry—been a salesman, did a season with a travelling circus—always trying to make more money than I would need to spend next week, and never quite making it.

Fred calls me a cynic. With my history, can you blame me ? Right now, with him as a partner, I’m in the ‘promoting’ business. That’s just a highbrow way of saying that I try to convince the public that I have something they just can’t do without. You’ll see our stuff on TV and, if I do say it myself, it’s good. It does exactly what we claim for it. But I just cannot believe this will last. It will go wrong. With me, it

always does. As a matter of fact, I have to admit a certain excitement, a sort of awful curiosity, wondering just what Fate is going to cook up, this time !

That's why Fred calls me a cynic. That's not his line, at all. He's an unquenchable optimist—just as I used to be, once. I could feel sad about it, if I let myself. Actually, Fred has no business being in this game, at all, because he's a happily married man, and should be stuck into some regular, steady, money-making job. As it happens, it doesn't matter too much, because Mrs. Fred is earning, and making good money, too.

Now, it just so happens that our present, booming business is the direct outcome of a brilliant idea from Mrs. Fred, so I should tell you a bit about her. She is the advice-to-the-love-lorn column in one of the biggest national woman-magazines, and she is really dedicated to her work. Right here I want to contradict that old story about such advice columns being written by whiskery old men, smoking pipes and smelling of stale ale. It's not so, not in this case, anyway. Mrs. Fred is really something !

I could write a book about her, alone. Perhaps I will, someday, as she fascinates me—in the purest possible way, of course. She's tall—and dark—and gracious—with stacks of what actors call 'presence.' And she's beautiful, in a way that sort of steals up on you. But—she's naive ! And pig-headed with it ! I've never known anyone quite so childlike and simple. Not an atom of craft or deceit in her, and she wouldn't know how to think badly of anybody else. And you just cannot argue with her at all. Lord knows how she and Fred ever came to pair off, because he is small, volatile, voluble, and chock-a-bloc with the wildest, most hair-brained schemes I've ever run into. Still, these things happen, and that was the set-up, just two months ago, one warmish weekend.

We were all sitting in their front room, idly watching the TV and sneering at the puerile adverts—and we were crystal-clear empty.

"My head feels as vacant as a drum !" Fred groaned, as if in amazement that such a thing should happen to him. "I can hardly remember what an idea feels like !" I had to confess that I was in the same impoverished state. We gloomed. Mrs. Fred, who was sitting off to one side, knitting and

making that simple activity look like a work of grace, smiled graciously at us.

"You squander your ideas so freely," she murmured. "Now—my grandfather, such a quaint old man, used to write all his ideas down in a book. He used to say that the effort required to put them into words made them more solid. They carried more weight, that way, he thought. Wasn't that an odd thing to say—?"

"It's a good point," I argued. "The word written down is more convincing, to most people. Just think how many times you've heard somebody say 'But I've seen it in black and white!', and they think it makes all the difference, you know!"

"He always said he was a genius," she glowed, gently, "and he *was* an inventor, you know—you remember, Fred, the 'rainbow paint'!"

Now, I should imagine everybody knows about rainbow paint, by this time, even if nobody knows just why it works. Stroboscopy gets in there, somewhere, that much I do know. You expose a surface wearing this paint to ordinary fifty-cycle light, and it's plain grey. Speed up the frequency and the result is any colour of the spectrum you want, all the way from infra-red to ultra-violet. Hollywood have made a great thing out of it, in backdrops and scenic effects, and you can see its effects in any London stage-show.

"So that's where your family riches come from!" Fred said, all attention, now. "Did grandfather invent anything else?"

"Oh yes—!" she smiled. "But he never sold any more, you know. He said that if people really wanted things, they should invent their own. He just wrote his down in this book I was telling you about. He would invent something, try it out, write it down, and then go on to something else. He was a dear old man!"

"You any idea where this book is, now?" Fred asked, very carefully. She smiled, and nodded, and got up.

"Oh yes—I have it put away with some old things. I'll get it for you, if you like!" and she sailed out, graciously.

Fred just sat there, and I could almost feel him, vibrating.

"Take it steady, old man—" I advised, offering him a cigarette. "All due respect, and all that, but Grandad sounds like a nut, to me. Don't go counting on things too quick—"

"The rainbow paint works, doesn't it?"

"It does—and it's the craziest thing anybody's ever seen. I've had a stab at the formula myself, and it just doesn't make sense—"

"But it works. That's good enough for me, chum. I've heard some odd stuff about this aged relative—seems he went a bit soft in his old age; started dabbling in metaphysics, the occult, and all that—but so did Newton, if you remember. So long as the stuff works—we're not in any state to be choosy—"

She came back with the book, a massive old tome, leather-bound, smelling of stale gum and damp leather, and crammed with the weirdest, spidery script I have ever clapped eyes on. Fred had a point. We were in no condition to be fussy, but I took one look at that scrawl, and groaned. Fly-tracks from an ink-bottle weren't a patch on this. Then, with a second and third look, I managed to identify enough to tell me that it was in all sorts of languages, too. I could make out bits of Latin, German and French, and a few more that I didn't know at all. The English bits seemed to be saved for dollops of advice—pathways to greater self-knowledge—elevating the spirit—meeting the Cosmic Oversoul—that sort of thing.

A little bit of that stuff goes a long way with me. I saw a formula or two, along with some involved mathematics, but the text relating to them was in French, and I lost interest in French, when I left school. I lost all interest in this, too, very quickly. I let my attention slide back to the TV and left Fred to struggle on. He reads French about as well as I do, but he kept on going, doggedly, squinting at the spider-tracks and mumbling to himself. After a bit he said,

"Here—! What does 'rajuster' mean, do you suppose?"

"Sounds like 're-adjust'—'to put right' something like that. Why?"

"Well, unless I'm mistaken, this should be a formula which does just that. Here, read it for yourself!"

Now, if you think I'm going to write that formula down here, then you are even more naive than Mrs. Fred used to be. All I want to say, here, is that after a lot of brain-sweat, argument and scrabbling through a cheap conversation-book which I nipped out and bought, we achieved a translation of sorts—and it looked as if Fred was quite right. This purported to be a formula for a compound which 'set things right.' A

nostrum, patent-medicine or cure-all, whatever you like to call it.

"Of course, Fred, the whole thing is ridiculous—"

"So was the paint—!"

"Yes—I know—and there is a helluva market for this kind of thing, always. It looks a rational formula. Nothing toxic, so far as I can see, although there are one or two odd items. We could have it tested by one of the bigger laboratories—"

It all seemed so simple. And it was—is—a rational formula. By that I mean there were no exotic items, like lunatic's breath, or the left hind-leg of a cross-eyed graveyard rabbit—nothing like that. But my caution has become a part of me, by this time.

"How about an antidote, Fred?"

He sneered at this, loudly, but I wasn't having any. I made him look. We both looked. I may not write down all my ideas, like Mrs. Fred's grandparent, but that doesn't mean I don't *have* ideas. We wasted a lot of time, until we discovered that the French word is 'contrepoison.' We had been thinking that 'antidote' was a French word, anyway. A natural mistake. I know lots of people who think that 'Menu' is a French word, too!

Anyway, we found it, and that, also, was a sane formula. So, I wrote both of them down in my little book, and that was that. There were some fearsome mathematics alongside, but I'm duff where figures are concerned, so I left them out. Fred is the mathematical half of the team. Give him a problem involving numbers and he'll go for it, bald-headed. This one, he left to me. I had to do the leg-work.

It took me exactly a week. I had to work out some way of getting this stuff made up in quantities big enough to test, without giving it away to some nosy chemist. I've been in the business. I know them. After a lot of work I managed to break down the formulae into fractions, and get each fraction made separately. I had one safeguard. I knew that nothing happened until it entered into solution, with water.

Eventually, I had three twelve-ounce bottles, labelled 'A', 'B' and 'C', and full of a greyish-green powder. According to my figuring, you mixed a certain proportion of each, then added water, and you had it. All this time, Fred had been pestering me with phone calls about wild and hair-brained publicity schemes, never bothering about whether the stuff

was going to work or not, and Mrs. Figgins, my long-suffering landlady, was growing restive at having to call me downstairs to answer the phone every half-hour or so.

Caution again. I wanted to see, first of all, if the stuff would mix. Just that, for a start. Then, all being well, I had designs on her cat, a fat and sluggish animal, that spent most of its life curled up on the one stair that was in the shadow, thus endangering my life at every trip I made up or down. Tibby, which was its highly uninspired name, was slated to be a martyr, perhaps.

So, I stood an empty jam-jar in my sink. I added three miniature doses, agitated them together with a glass rod, and turned on the water, gently. I stirred, and watched. It became a dark red brew, then grew pinker and paler as the water trickled in. Nothing sensational to look at, anyway. Then—quite gently, without any fuss, the whole brew became crystal clear, dropped and ran away down the waste-pipe—and I was left there, wagging my glass rod in—nothing!

Of the jam-jar there was no sign. For a good five minutes I stood, quite still, too much of a damn fool to drop everything and run for it, yet expecting, any minute, a blasted great explosion to come belching up out of the waste-pipe. But nothing happened. My faculties began to mesh again. My first wild guess was that perhaps the stuff had dissolved the jam-jar! That will give you some idea just how shattered I was. Then I noticed that the glass rod was still in my hand, and undamaged. So it wasn't that. But what the hell *had* happened?

The only thing I could think of was to try it again, with a much greater dilution, this time. That meant smaller quantities, and a bigger jar of some kind. My cheap balance wasn't good enough to reduce the quantities by more than a half, and I hadn't anything big enough for a receptacle. So I went with my problem to Mrs. Figgins. She produced for me a huge ornamental bowl, the purpose of which I didn't dare guess at, ornamented with flowers and cupids, and bearing the legend, in fading gilt 'Souvenir of Blackpool.' I had to warn her that it might be damaged, even broken, and she sniffed.

"I've 'ad it thirty years, come August, ducks," she told me, "and I been trying my best, I give you my word, to break the dratted thing, sort of by accident like. Don't seem right to bust it on purpose, seeing as my Albert used to set such a store by it. Wouldn't use nothing else, he wouldn't. But I

'ates the sight of the nasty thing, that I do. Tried, I 'ave, but all I can do is chip it a bit. So don't you worry yourself, dear—I shan't mind if I never sees it again—!"

This time, with half the amounts, I ran in the water, and stood at arm's length, feeling a fool, and stirring. And nothing happened! I waited all of half-an-hour, stirring the pink fluid, noting its smell, which was something very like the pine essence they use in modern germicides—and wondering whether I was losing my grip. Then I poured the stuff away, rinsed out the pot, and took it back to Mrs. Figgins, completely baffled.

She saw it first.

"Cor!" she cried, holding the thing up and turning it in her hands. "Blow me if it don't look bran' new—!" And then I could see it, too. All the glitter had come back to the gilding, the colours were brave and bright, even the chips and the craze in the glazing, were gone. It looked like new! Mrs. Figgins stared past it at me, and her eyes were round, and wide.

"New process I'm working on—" I mumbled, hastily. "Haven't got it just right yet—it's still a secret—don't say a word to anyone, will you, Mrs. Figgins!" and I stumbled off upstairs in a daze, wondering just what we'd got hold of, this time. Re-adjust, indeed! This was putting things right, with a vengeance. And we had thought it was a nostrum! Why on earth couldn't the silly old blighter write his stuff out in plain English? But—and I came back to earth with a rush—what about the jam-jar?

It was a large-size problem, and it was all mine. Then I remembered that it was no such thing. I had a partner. Why should I have all the grief? Come to think of it, I'd done all the work, so far, anyway! So I stayed just long enough to make up half-a-dozen dry doses, in six of those little glass tubes they use to put up headache tablets. I usually have a stack of them around the place. Then I went to see Fred.

They live in a nice old house, out in the suburbs, standing in its own bit of ground. A legacy from his wife's family, I believe. As I walked up the garden path I thought, for the thousandth time, what a chump he was to get mixed up with my kind of business—and I argued, as always, maybe he

wasn't so stupid, because it didn't matter a damn to him, one way or the other, whether a thing boomed, or bust. Not like me. This was my bread and butter—with the rare helping of jam. Which reminded me again of that damned jam-jar!

I told him exactly what I had done, and he was as baffled, at first, as I was. Mrs. Fred just sat and listened to us, looking exactly like a fond and indulgent Mama admiring two small boys showing off. Irritated me, it did!

"Maybe temperature has something to do with it—" Fred hazarded, shaking one of the little bottles in his hand and frowning at it. "Maybe that first lot of water had been standing in the pipe and got warm, or something—"

"So—?"

"So let's try some in hot water, see what happens, eh?"

"All right—but it had better be something big. If orthodoxy means anything at all, heat should augment the reaction—if it is a reaction at all—which I wouldn't bet on—"

So Fred, with a breadth of vision I would never claim, decided to use the bath! I would never have dreamed of it. To him it was obvious. We ran a bathful of hot water—and we dunked in a tube full of the powder—and the water went pink—and there was that piney smell. And that was all! With a pause for disappointment, Fred began conjuring up schemes. Did I have something defective with me, that we could drop in, and see if it got fixed? I didn't—only my head, maybe, and I preferred it the way it was, even if it did have a hole in it. Didn't *he* have something broken around the place? Not a thing! Should we taste some? That I rejected without a moment's hesitation. Frankly I wasn't any too keen just breathing in the smell, never mind drinking any of it.

Tempers began to rise, while the temperature of the water went down, and Fred was about to pull the plug, along with a few words about my adventurous spirit, when Mrs. Fred chipped in. She had been standing with us, watching, and I was about to come back with a few comments of my own. After all, I didn't see *him* rushing to take a swig!

"I have an idea—" she said, sweetly, and we hushed, at once. "I think," she said, "that grandfather meant this to be an application—like a lotion, or a liniment, or something. After all, it does smell like that stuff you use to kill germs—!"

"So?" we breathed in chorus.

"So I think I shall take a bath in it!"

Well—what would you have done? We pleaded, swore, argued and protested. We did everything short of brute force—and you can't manhandle a gracious and beautiful woman in her own bathroom. I can't, anyway. She had it all worked out. There was a bathful of nice warm water; it was about her bath-time, anyway; it smelled nice; dear grandfather wouldn't do anything to harm anyone, she was sure of that.

That last bit made me want to cry. Grandfather was a nut, but you couldn't tell her that. And she had her own way, in the end. We were beat. What made it worse was that we had to leave. I mean, you can't stand by and observe an experiment if it involves a very lovely woman taking a bath—can you? The scientific method has its limits—and that's one of them. So, reluctantly and still arguing, we had to leave her to it. We went downstairs, slowly.

"Fred—" I said, desperately, "Look—let's have another go at the old lunatic's notebook. Maybe there's something we have missed. We might get a clue. Damn it, he must have had some idea what he was up to—!"

We had just reached the bottom step. He grabbed my arm.

"Listen!" he said. "You hear anything?"

I listened, and I heard it, sure enough.

"Sounds like a baby crying—!"

"Crying—?" he grinned. "Screaming its head off, more like—!" and he was quite right. We listened—and then the same thought exploded in both our minds at once. This was a detached house—no near neighbours—that crying baby was right here with us—was upstairs—was in the bathroom!

I was one jump behind him as we burst in the door. Oh—I know I had no business to, but I was, just the same—and there, in the water that was now crystal-clear, struggled a tiny girl-baby no more than nine or ten months old, hanging on to the soap-rack like grim death, and screaming with rage. Fred was as paralysed as me, for a moment. Then he shot to the bath, scooped up the infant, while I fumbled around with towels—and I saw the next bit, close up. The baby clenched a tiny fist and bopped him on the nose, as deliberately as you like. That convinced me.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" he mumbled, as we got back to the living room, and he tried hard to act like a Daddy. "This is my wife, isn't it?"

"Certainly looks that way," I had to admit. "There wasn't anyone else in the bathroom. I looked. So—crazy as it sounds—!" I shrugged, and the baby screamed.

"What are we going to do, now?"

"I dunno—let's have a look at that blasted book—!"

Well, as soon as ever I clapped eyes on it again I saw where we had gone wrong. Call it subconscious effect, if you like, but I could see, now, that it wasn't 'rajuster,' at all, but 'rajeuner,' which, when we looked it up, means 'to make young again; to rejuvenate.' I cursed Fred, and he raved back at me, then we joined forces and called down our wrath on grandfather for being a shocking scribbler. Now that we knew what to look for, we saw some sense in the figures, too. He had *not* written that it had taken him twenty-five years to perfect the stuff, as we had thought—but that the stuff had the effect of displacing an object back in time twenty-five years, or that's what it looked like, anyway. Mrs. Fred, as I knew, was expecting her twenty-sixth birthday in a couple of months' time. Fred's hair went a couple of shades lighter when he got the implications behind that.

Then I thought of the 'contrepoison'! Now, I'd done some work on this, already, in my usual cautious way, and I happened to know that that formula consisted merely of the 'A' and 'C' fractions, plus ordinary commercial sodium bicarbonate. So far as I could follow the horrible scribble, it had a strong effect on the sodium ion concentration in body-tissues. Anyway, I had it.

I gabbled a hasty explanation to Fred, and fled, leaving him holding the baby. Back in my rooms I sorted out a whole stack of the weird stuff, using up all my little bottles. Then I caught a taxi back to Fred's place. It was close on midnight. I had been gone about two hours—and Fred had aged in my absence. Nothing magical in that, though.

"You sure this is my wife?" he groaned, showing me the teeth-marks and scratches. "She certainly has a filthy temper—now!" His tie was up under one ear, his hair on end, and, for the first time in his life, he looked henpecked. By a baby!

"Maybe she'll grow out of it," I jested, but he didn't crack a smile, and I didn't think it was so very funny, either. We went upstairs. I ran the water, tried it with my elbow like it tells you in the literature, and dumped in the antidote. This

time the water went a cloudy golden colour, and smelled, vaguely, of iodine. Fred held the baby, and hesitated. I had no mind to blame him, at all, but what else was there to do? Peeling off the towel, he held her out, and lowered, gingerly. The baby kicked like mad, and there was a splash—and a squall which cut off in a bubbling gurgle.

"I've dropped her!" he yelled, grabbing frantically beneath the agitated water. "She'll drown—" I dropped the towel and leaned over to help, and ducked back, hurriedly, as Mrs. Fred stood up in the bath, fixing us with the maddest glare we had ever seen on her face.

"When you've quite finished digging me in the ribs!" she snapped, with water streaming from her flattened, plastered hair, and she drew a big breath. We shall never know just what blistering things she was going to call us, for at that moment she realised that she was standing up to her knees in clear water—and as naked as—a baby! She crouched, and spun round, frantically, going pink all over. We got out—quick!

By the time she re-appeared, damp and furious, we had almost forgotten about her. You see, the figures began to make sense, now, and, as I have mentioned, Fred is the boy for maths. He tore into those weird scribbles, scratching away with pencil and paper, and babbling to himself all the time, and it was working out fine. For convenience, we called one potion 'plus' and the other 'minus.' Undiluted or diluted, it made no difference; the time-shift was twenty-five years, either way. But by combining the two—!

"We should be able to get a controlled shift, don't you see it?" Fred was almost sparking with enthusiasm, and this time he had me with him. With the right combination of dope we should be able to shift a thing twenty-five years back, or anywhere in between. Mrs. Fred came in on us, breathing fire.

"Pair of lunatics!" she stormed. "I might have been killed, drowned—fat lot you care, either of you!" I was stunned by the change in her ways, but Fred was too hot on the scent to even notice.

"Forget that!" he told her, crisply. "Use your head—I want a supply of identical objects, of known date of origin—of various dates—see what you can do!"

Talk about Caesar giving orders! She went off like a lamb, and she came up with the answer, too, whilst I had to think

twice just to see what he was getting at. A series of identical objects—of known dates—and a range of dates. I would never have thought of it in a thousand years, but it took her ten minutes to round up old newspapers, all the way from yesterday's to one three months old. Then we got out the rare old cut-glass from the cabinet ; every piece an heirloom and guaranteed ; no danger of that disappearing into thin air.

Then we weighed and measured and added little pinches of powder to the glasses, and we went along, solemnly, topping them up with genuine tap-water. If anyone had broken in, we'd have been carted off to the laughing academy right away, without the option. But that scene was nothing to the moment when we snipped off a clip from the oldest newspaper, and dipped it in the most negative brew. The water was pink—then it was clear—and—no paper ! Holding our collective breaths, we handed Fred another clipping from the same paper, to dip in the second test-sample—and it went clean. All the print vanished !

"That's something, just by itself," Fred grinned, while we breathed again, and Mrs. Fred snatched anxiously at her towel. "There never has been a satisfactory bleach for newspaper, anyway. Right ! Press on— !"

We did. By daybreak, we had two satisfactory solutions. One would shift an object back a week, the other, a month. We were red-eyed and weary, but jubilant. We had it !

But what did we have ? When I stopped to think of it, I began to have my doubts. What were we going to do with it ? I asked Fred, and he beamed all over his face.

"Cosmetics !" he said, triumphantly. "Imagine a woman using a face-cream containing this ! Every time she uses it, she'll be a month younger. It won't show right off, perhaps, but, after a while—can you see it ?"

I could. I thought about it, and, the more I thought, the more I liked it. I was building sales-campaigns, advertising, working out ways of getting the Pharmaceutical people interested enough to test it for safety, when Mrs. Fred dropped it on us, coldly.

"Fred !" she said, flatly. "You are a fool. I've always suspected it. Now I know. 'Schoolgirl complexion,' indeed ! Schoolgirls, I must tell you, have shiny faces and pimples. I know—I used to be one. You've been so indoctrinated with advertising propaganda that you're believing it. This stuff is real—not a publicity man's dream world— !"

"All right!" I said, a bit nettled. "What's your bright idea, then? A pep-up tonic—? Or bath-salts?"

Of course, I shouldn't have said that. I realised it as soon as I'd spoken, but I had the next ten minutes to think it over, while she told me my fortune. My past, present, and a brief excursion into my probable future, without any pausing for breath. Then, with arrogant triumph, she told us.

"It's a renovator, isn't it?" she demanded. "Well then—sell it as such. Mix it with a detergent and advertise it as something that will bring old carpets, lino and paintwork up like new! It's obvious, isn't it?"

And, of course, it was, once we'd been told. It's only a couple of months, now, since that great moment, and already 'Nulook' is going over big. I suppose that's only natural, since it does, literally, make stuff like new—or newer, at any rate. Of course, we had to put a label on it, warning people to use it only on old stuff—and we decided to use the 'one month' dose. At this very minute Fred is still figuring out a way to sell it to some other industry. It's not so easy. All sorts of complications come in when you shift things back in time.

But what I'm waiting for—Ah!—just a minute, the phone!

I knew it—I just knew it. That was Fred. He says the office is beginning to fill up with irate complaints. One woman, for instance, used Nulook on her new lino—and it isn't there any more. Someone else, a man, used it on his new car, not long off the assembly line—and all he has now is a pile of crude, unshaped metal—and at least three women have tried mixing the stuff in buckets, only to repeat my jam-jar experience. Things get into the shops so quickly, these days!

That's a start. There'll be more, you may be sure. Know what I'm going to do, now? I'm going to take a bath—a rather special bath. They can't sue a minor—can they?

—John Rackham

This is the first of a series of articles dealing with the formative years of fantasy and science fiction and the great writers who have contributed to its advancement. American writer Sam Moskowitz, noted bibliophile and researcher, is probably the world's leading expert on this subject and well qualified to write such an outstanding series.

THE SONS OF FRANKENSTEIN

BY SAM MOSKOWITZ

The most important woman contributor to nineteenth century science fiction—a field only meagerly graced by the writings of the so-called “gentler sex”—was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, author of the scientific-horror classic, *Frankenstein*. That novel marked the decline of the widely popular Gothic horror story school of writers and also paved the way for a transition from superstition and legend to a firm foundation of science as the basic ingredient of successful fantastic literature.

In the realm of science fiction, *Frankenstein* was, in addition the first story to skillfully amalgamate the previously isolated forms practiced in the field, such as the travel tale, the fiction-disguised Utopian prophecy, and the almost factual science story, thus influencing a chain of distinguished authors from Edgar Allen Poe, to Nathaniel Hawthorne, to Fitz-James O'Brien, to Jules Verne to Ambrose Bierce and so on to the greatest science fiction writer of them all, H. G. Wells, and through Wells the whole vast field of modern science fiction which we enjoy today.

The earliest approach to science fiction was the Travel Tale and in that particular realm Homer's *Odyssey* has never been surpassed. In an era when the "entire world" was thought to be geographically confined to the Mediterranean basin, and when all that was known of the stars had been fitted neatly into the fabrications of Greek mythology, a pack donkey or a sailing ship was every bit as good a device as a spaceship for locating strange and bizarre civilizations and boldly seeking out fantastic adventures on the rim of the world.

Authors took full advantage of the microscopic knowledge of the Earth's surface and the miniscule scientific information of the period to send their fancies roving at will. The ancient authors and titles of dozens of scroll-inscribed adventures are known, even today, and there is no telling how many more may have been erased by the slow passage of time.

Nearly as old as the Travel Tale is the still very much alive, creatively imaginative form of science fiction known as the Future Utopia. Such stories were usually pure fabrications, carefully voicing the author's discontent with the state of the world in which he found himself, and taking the reader on a tour of an ideally constructed civilization closer to his heart's desire.

Some of these stories were exceedingly satiric in tone and though they often incorporated elements of the Travel Tale, were differentiated sharply by the fact that intellectual concepts, rather than a desire to entertain, dominated the thinking of almost all Utopian-minded writers. Outstanding Utopias are *The Republic* and *Critias* by Plato, *Utopia* by Thomas More, *The New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon, and *Oceana* by James Harrington.

The third major category, in which an extrapolation upon the physical sciences and the social sciences is very much in evidence, was the last type to arrive on the scene. Previous to 1800, science stories received scant attention, the two major examples of fiction stressing scientific theory being *Somnium : or the Astronomy of the Moon* by Johannes Kepler, first published in 1634 and *Voyage to the Moon* by Cyrano de Bergerac, first published in 1657.

The old Travel Tale was primarily looked upon as a literature of escape. The prophetic Utopia was a literature of political and social reform through philosophical as well as material change, and the science story was a kind of experiment in public education through sugar-coated science on a fireside journal plane. Before Mary Shelley, these three forms tended to be very sharply differentiated. *Frankenstein* proved that it was possible to blend and enrich them with a single compelling purpose in mind—to turn out a work of fiction that was entertaining as well as thought-provoking.

Frankenstein ; or, The Modern Prometheus was first published in three volumes by Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mayor and Jones ; Finsbury Square, London, on March 11, 1818. At the time the novel appeared, Mary Shelley was twenty, but she began writing the story sometime during May, 1816, when she was only eighteen.

The work was an instant sensation. Though horrified by its subject matter, the critical journals of the day unanimously lauded the excellence of its writing and the forthrightness of its execution. *The Edinburgh Magazine and Literary Miscellany* for March, 1818, said in part : "There never was a wilder story imagined ; yet, like most of the fiction of this age, it has an air of reality attached to it, by being connected to the favourite projects and passions of the times."

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for March, 1818, said : "Upon the whole, the work impresses us with the high idea of the author's original genius and happy power of expression. We shall be delighted to hear that he had inspired to *paullo majora* ; and in the meantime, congratulate our readers upon a novel which excites new reflections and untried sources of emotion."

Published anonymously, the work was universally believed to be that of a man, the most informed guesses attributing it

to Percy Bysshe Shelley, probably because he had written an introduction to the volume. The appearance of a second novel by Mary Shelley in 1823, a non-fantasy titled *Valperga*, helped to dispel these misconceptions. In *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for March, 1823, a reviewer confessed: "*Frankenstein*, at the time of its appearance, we certainly did not suspect to be the work of a female hand. The name of Shelley was whispered, and we did not hesitate to attribute the book to Mr. Shelley himself. Soon, however, we were set right. We learned that *Frankenstein* was written by Mrs. Shelley; and then we most undoubtedly said to ourselves, 'For a man it was excellent, but for a woman it was wonderful.'"

What sort of upbringing could inspire a teen-age girl to write a novel that even today is generally regarded as the single greatest novel in the horror story tradition ever written? Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's life is even more fantastic than her monstrous creation. Born August 30, 1797 at the Polygon, Somers Town, England, her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died only ten days after her birth. Her father, William Godwin, has been referred to as a second-rate Samuel Johnson with proper table manners. In his day he was widely heralded as the head of a movement of free thinkers.

Though trained for the clergy he believed firmly in free love, atheism and anarchy. He believed that the proper use of logic and reason could solve all of man's problems. He was opposed to the intrusion of emotions into the fabric of the orderly life, and denounced the age's obsession with selfish materialism and accumulation of wealth.

The works which established Godwin's reputation were *The Inquiry Concerning Political Justice*, published in 1793, and *Things As They Are: or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, which first appeared in 1794. *Things As They Are* was fiction and of the Gothic school for all of its directness of writing, even though it carried a pronounced social message. It was Godwin's intent to expose the abuses that can arise from concentration of too much power in the hands of a few and the ordeals encountered by Caleb Williams, persecuted by a wealthy man against whom he has gained evidence of murder, forthrightly and savagely illustrates that point.

In most of his thinking, Godwin was an uncompromising critic of things as they were. He also wrote a novel of science-fantasy entitled *St. Leon, A Tale of the 16th Century*, which appeared in 1799. This novel is a fable of immortality, wherein the lead character, St. Leon, brews and drinks an elixir of life and wanders, deathless, throughout the world, inadvertently bringing sorrow and tribulation to everyone he encounters.

The theme, derived from the legend of The Wandering Jew, was hoary with age even when Godwin wrote it, but introducing an alchemical means rather than a supernatural one of extending life was new to the Gothic tale and a harbinger of the definite break that his daughter, Mary, was to make with the Gothic tradition in her novel *Frankenstein*. Critics generally credit this work with specifically influencing the writing of three famous Gothic novels: *Melmoth the Wanderer* by Charles Robert Maturin; *St. Irvynne* by Percy Bysshe Shelley and *Strange Story* by Lord Bulwer Lytton.

Mary's mother had been every bit as determined a free thinker as her husband. Having lived for several years as the mistress of an American named Gilbert Imlay, she eventually found herself cast off with an illegitimate child. She met Godwin in 1796 and married him in March, 1797. They kept their marriage a secret, fearing ridicule as hypocrites.

Mrs. Godwin was also a prominent author in her own right. Before her marriage she had published a pamphlet entitled *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, a novel called *Mary* and an illustrated edition of *Original Stories from Real Life*. She became most renowned for her book *The Rights of Women*. The title is self-explanatory.

Through the fame of her father, the young girl met many literary figures who visited the household, not the least of whom was Charles Lamb and most important, the great poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was first introduced to Mary on May 5, 1814. Shelley, though only twenty-two at the time, was already famous, as having established a reputation for poetry that was described as the essence of sweetness, beauty and spirituality. A youthful atheist, he shared many of Godwin's views.

Though still married to his first wife, Harriet Westbrook, Shelley induced Mary to run off with him on July 28, 1814, accompanied by her liberal-minded half-sister, Claire.

After Shelley's wife committed suicide—she had been offered a domestic position with her husband and his mistress—the union with Mary was legalized and the stage was set for the writing of *Frankenstein*. This came about through the close friendship of Shelley with Lord Byron.

Since the three were prone to read ghost stories to one another, together with a friend of Byron's, an Italian physician named John William Polidari, it was decided to have a contest in which Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Lord Byron and John William Polidari would compete to see who could write the most paralyzing novel of horror.

All but Mary Shelley proceeded to begin work on their novels. Both Percy Shelley and Lord Byron lost interest before going too far and the fragment that Byron completed was tacked on to the end of his poem, *Mazeppa*. Doctor Polidari doggedly kept at it and eventually finished a novel about a female "Peeping Tom" who was punished for what she saw by being consigned to a tomb in Capulet. This novel was published and enjoyed a small sale because of the public's impression that it was written by Lord Byron.

Mary Shelley, for days could not even think of an idea. Finally, after listening in on a philosophical discussion between her husband and Lord Byron regarding the nature of life, she experienced a vivid dream in which she saw a scientific student create artificial life in a laboratory. She realized she had her story and proceeded to write it.

The theme of the story is by now almost universally familiar. A young scientist, Victor Frankenstein, pieces together a human-like creature from parts obtained from slaughter-houses and graveyards and infuses it with life through scientific means. When he sees his monstrous creation begin to move, he becomes frightened by his accomplishment and flees.

The monster wanders away, eventually is embittered by the fear and persecution he is subjected to because of his appearance and finally searches out the young Frankenstein from whom he exacts a promise to make a female companion for him. The monster promises he will then go with her to some far-off place, forever beyond the sight of man.

Nearing success in creating a female, Frankenstein is filled with doubts as to the wisdom of his project, and wrestles with his conscience: "*But now, for the first time, the wickedness of my promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me as their pest, whose selfishness had not*

hesitated to buy its own peace at the price, perhaps of the existence of the whole human race."

Frankenstein compulsively destroys the uncompleted body of the female he has been constructing. The monster, who observes this action, waits his chance for revenge, which he obtains by murdering Frankenstein's fiancée on her wedding night. Goaded by sorrow, Frankenstein dedicates his life to searching out and destroying the monster. But after years of chasing a seeming phantom, Frankenstein dies aboard the cabin of a ship in the far north, without fulfilling his purpose.

The monster enters the cabin through a window and, when confronted by a friend of Frankenstein's, expresses supreme remorse at the tragedy he has brought into the life of his creator. When he leaves, he promises to destroy himself, thereby ending his own personal agony as well as fulfilling Frankenstein's desire for vengeance.

This oblivion was purely rhetorical. Frankenstein's monster was destined for immortality. Some 140 years later a number of editions of *Frankenstein* are still in print and *Pyramid Books* has recently re-issued it as a pocket book. Though the style and writing techniques are dated, the story still retains a grandiose element of horror, as well as many almost poetic passages which sustain its life as a literary work.

Beyond its appeal as a work of literary art in the realm of scientific horror, *Frankenstein* has a visual shock appeal surpassed by few stories, both as a play and moving picture. Five years after its first appearance as a book, *Presumption; or the Fate of Frankenstein* appeared on the London stage. The play was a smash hit and the same year found two other companies presenting serious versions with another three offering burlesques of the story.

A part of the original success of *Presumption* as a play was attributed to the superior acting ability of T. P. Cooke, an outstanding performer of the early part of the nineteenth century, whose name became synonymous with the role of Frankenstein's monster. At least fifteen versions of Mary Shelley's famous book have been produced as plays in England, France and the United States, two of the versions within the past thirty years.

The moving picture history of the book bids fair to outdo that of the stage in number of versions and far outdistances

it as a money making medium. Boris Karloff catapulted to a fame that has far eclipsed that of T. P. Cooke in the role of the monster when the film *Frankenstein* was first released in 1932. Its success was nothing short of fabulous and it was followed by *The Bride of Frankenstein*.

The first two films on the Frankenstein theme were strongly rooted upon incidents in Mary Shelley's book, but the clamour for more film sequels necessitated writing original stories as vehicles and there followed at spasmodic intervals the lesser known sequels, *Son of Frankenstein* and *Ghost of Frankenstein*. As with the play, burlesques began to appear on the screen and we had *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man*, *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* and *House of Frankenstein*. There was also the strange takeoff on juvenile delinquency, *I Was a Teenage Frankenstein*.

The Curse of Frankenstein, a recent release, returns to the original story pattern.

When Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, the high tide of the Gothic novel was already abating and would soon be credited with helping to usher in the romantic period in British literature which was to follow. What Mary Shelley did was salvage the supernatural and horror aspect of that literature, which is best epitomized by Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and perpetuate their thrills by applying the light of scientific rationality, which was already dissolving the mystical superstitions of the masses.

The superiority of her method is attested by the fact that the appeal of the three great landmarks in Gothic fiction mentioned above has faded. Even the fast-moving, sex-charged *Monk* is revived only as a collector's item, whereas the comparatively more dated and slower presentation, *Frankenstein*, is still popularly read.

Mary Shelley, wrote a good many other novels, short stories and non-fiction works, which have been obscured by the fame of *Frankenstein*. Of greatest interest to readers of science fiction is her very long novel, *The Last Man*, which was first published by Colburn in London, in three volumes, during 1826. A similar edition appeared the same year in Paris.

By this time Mary Shelley's life had undergone great change. Her husband, Percy Shelley, drowned in a small boat with several friends on July 8th, 1822. Mary had lost four of five children and now only one son, Percy Florence, survived. Shelley's love had been anything but torrid towards the last and he had been involved in at least one other blatant affair. Mary, holding tight to the memory of what had been good in her marriage, fanned into enduring constancy the flame of her love for Percy Bysshe as a beacon to his memory.

She never remarried, though other worthy suitors desired her, including John Howard Payne, who wrote the song "Home Sweet Home." One of the lead characters in her book, *The Last Man*, is unquestionably Percy Bysshe Shelley—another is Lord Byron—and this volume describes many of the European scenes she visited with him.

Biographers have poetically described the wanderings of Verney in *The Last Man* as an allegorical symbol of the twenty-nine years that Mary Shelley was to spend as a lost spirit in a world become a desert, now that her husband was gone. Perhaps this was so. Perhaps as women tend to forget the pain of childbirth they also gloss over the sordid in a romantic attachment.

The action of *The Last Man* begins in the year 2092, when a plague strikes Constantinople. It quickly spreads and a small group of survivors assemble in Paris where they debate trivialities until a recurrence of the invisible death kills all except one man, who wanders down through Italy and finally sets sail in a skiff to scour the coastlines of the Earth for survivors. Though laid in the future, its primary innovation is passenger balloon service.

The Last Man, while it enjoyed a fair sale in a number of countries, was not a good book for Mary's reputation. The critics were hard on it. To a man they condemned its long-winded tediousness; its almost terrifying descriptions of the deadly disease slowly decimating the populations of the earth until only one man, Verney, is left amid a world desolate of humanity and sardonic in the vibrant green of a new spring. Their criticisms degenerated into personal, satiric jibes at Mary Shelley that hurt her reputation so badly that her publisher took on her next novel only after she agreed to a considerably reduced advance.

Yet *The Last Man* is now generally regarded as the second best of her works. While admittedly pedestrian in pace and excessively wordy, it possesses a beauty of phraseology that is often poetic, finely drawn characterization and her relation of the final agonies induced by the plague represents a masterpiece of horror in literature.

This story proves that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had an abiding interest in concepts which we today label as science fiction. It is true that *The Last Man* theme was old when she wrote it, a particularly popular novel *The Last Man or Omegarus and Syderia: A Romance In Futurity*, having been published by Dutton, London, in two volumes in 1805, nor is her novel destined to become the classic presentation of the theme. Nevertheless it eliminated the possibility that her youthful venture into science fiction in *Frankenstein* was a mere coincidence.

Mary Shelley also wrote a number of short stories, most of which were collected into a volume called *Tales and Stories*, edited by Richard Garnett and published by William Patterson and Co., London, in 1891. Two of the stories in this book are fantasy. The first of these, *Transformation*, originally published in the annual *Keepsake* for 1831, tells of a young wastrel, who, fleeing from the problems of his excesses, meets, floating into shore atop a sea chest, "a misshapen dwarf with squinting eyes, distorted features and body deformed, till it became a horror to behold." This dwarf, who has supernatural powers, offers to swap the sea chest filled with jewels for the use of the young man's body for a short time.

The young man, after some thought, agrees to the proposal. When the strange creature does not return at the allotted time, the young man, now in the dwarf's grotesque frame, goes searching and finds this creature wooing his girl. Convinced that the dwarf will not keep his promise, he engages himself in combat, is run through, stabs his antagonist in return and awakes to find himself once again in his own body.

The second tale, *The Mortal Immortal*, originally published in the *Keepsake* for 1834, appears to have been inspired by William Godwin's book, *St. Leon*, and deals with an alchemist's helper, who, by chance drinks an elixir of immortality. The problems which he encounters when he later marries and his wife grows old while he remains young are excellently related.

At the tale's end, his wife has died and he plans a venture—not revealed—which may cause his death. If the theme had not been done so many, many times since in just the same way and if surprise endings had not come into vogue, this story might be rated, even currently, as above average.

What we know of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley through her letters, is today preserved and read primarily for the light it sheds on her famous husband and only secondarily because she authored the great horror novel *Frankenstein*. Yet, the future students of the history of science fiction may be grateful that, because of this fortuitous circumstance, the motivating factors are apparent in the life of the woman who wrote the novel which truly began an unbroken chain of science fiction development—a chain which produced more prominent literary heirs than the moving pictures are likely to provide sequels to her inspired work, *Frankenstein*.

—Sam Moskowitz

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THE LADY WAS JAZZ

BY JOHN KIPPAX

At the *Belle Marie*, in Teak Street, the Lou Joris Seven had finished the second session of the evening, and Lou turned to look at Mae Becique as she took her place at the piano, where she would be for the next half hour. Fine girl. Her smile said 'I love you' and it caused the slight scowl that was nearly always present on Lou's face to vanish completely for a full ten seconds. That scowl was the expression of a man who never quite gets his music from his mind, because he is never quite satisfied with what he plays.

Cindy Laverne, who owned the club, came through the press of customers and the hazy, one thirty a.m. atmosphere, and held out two big brown arms. "Lou man, I love you! What was the last number you played? That was the mostest horn!"

"Stole it," said Lou. "Got it off a disc I picked up this afternoon, in a junk shop. 'Scratch My Back' by somebody and his Red Beans and Rice Gang. Most of it sounded like the playback of a hailstorm, but that trumpet chorus I copied was really something."

Cindy frowned. "'Scratch My Back.' I never heard that title."

"Pops Henrique says he heard it, way back." Pops Henrique was sixty-four, and bass players didn't come any better. And where was there a finer clarinet man than Willie Heeler, or a trombone who could outplay Paul Tourelle in their kind of music? That Joris guy was the trouble, thought Lou Joris.

Cindy said, "Well for me, that number was a gasser. Remember we got to talk about your renewal, sometime."

Lou grinned. "So we don't leave home, even after three years? I won't forget."

He was on the point of going off to the bandroom, when someone came and stood very close to him; he turned and saw that it was the girl who had been sitting in one of the alcoves. He started; he remembered that he had been playing the solo chorus of 'Scratch My Back' when he got the impression that she had suddenly appeared at the table in the alcove. Just like that. One second, the table had seemed vacant, and the next, there she was. His jaw dropped slightly; this one was a good looker plus. She had dark wavy hair and a golden brown complexion, her nose was straight and her lips very red. Her eyes were black and glittering; a shiny white dress fitted her like a second skin. She put a slim, beringed hand on his arm and spoke huskily.

"Sounds like the boiler's puffing tonight."

He stared at her, already captured. "Yeah?" The rest of the club, the lights, the customers, the piano music, seemed far away.

She said, "Those cats of yours know what it's all about, but it's you I want to talk to."

"Pleasure," he said, looking hard.

"Shall we sit? You get me a drink, and come and talk to me."

He could feel Mae's eyes burning a hole in the back of his neck. Resentment stirred; why shouldn't he talk to another girl?—especially if she looked like this.

"Table over here." He threaded a way through, and they sat down just out of sight of the band stage. That will make Mae mad, he thought. So what? They took drinks; she had a brandy, he a beer.

"You've not been in here, before."

She was amused. "No?"

He shook his head. "I'd have noticed."

"I haven't been in lately." Her gaze was very steady. "I came because you called me."

"Hah? I never called you. Wish I had, before now."

Her smile was enigmatic. She did not speak until she had finished her drink. She rose. "Suppose we grab some of that cool morning air outside? Just you, just me?"

He got up. There was no thought of refusal. "All right," he agreed, "we'll do that. I have about twenty minutes."

They crossed to the foot of the stairs; he heard Mae fit some harsh chords to a sentimental tune, and he caught her meaning. Ignore it, he thought; this, I've got to track down. They went up the outer steps, into the coolness, and strolled on. From basement windows and downstairs places came the sound of tinkly pianos, a slow-breathing tenor caressing his instrument, a blues shouter giving out over the engine-like thrum of his guitar. Teak Street, seven nights a week, fifty-two weeks a year.

They turned a corner, where a breeze blew along from the river. A steamer moaned low. She stopped.

"Lou Joris, you called me when you played that chorus you copied from the record."

"I don't get it. What's your name?"

"Lee Cayou."

"Well—"

"I'm what you'd call the spirit of jazz."

He stared at her for a long time. He wanted to say, "Lady, I have to be shown,"—but he didn't.

She said, "You wondered how I got here? None of your business. But you're my business now—for as long as you're worth it."

He shook his head slowly.

"Lou, that record you found was Louis Armstrong's first. I heard him, and I gave him a start, with that chorus. He's not needed me since."

"That I can understand." He still felt that he wanted to play for time. He took hold of her arms, gently. "So you just arrived—like that. Could you disappear the same way?"

"Yes. Don't you believe me?"

"Didn't say anything about believing or not."

The steamer called again, distantly. A lone woman strolled by; the breeze moved Lee's hair. Lou *didn't* believe her. This was just some chick trying a new line. They rarely ran after him, but—she was nice, though. Did she mind being drawn closer? She smiled, and said, "Not yet, Lou. Wait. Watch." A shiver ran through her, and she seemed to become less in his arms until, after a few seconds, there was no one. For a little time he stood with his hands in the same position in which she left him; her perfume lingered. So, it *was* true. He turned back and walked slowly into Teak Street. As he neared the *Belle Marie*, he realised that Lee Cayou was from all the races which had contributed to jazz—the pure African, the French, the Spanish, the Indian.

He found himself going down the stairs into the club. It was still almost full. On the stand, Mae was playing her last number; some of the band were climbing back to their chairs. He collected his horn and watched them assemble. Avoiding her eye, he reminded his men about the recording session. Mae walked up behind him and hissed, "Let 'em start without you; I wanna talk."

He decided that he might as well do that; she got worse if she had anything to bottle up. He told Willy to pick three numbers, and he and Mae stood aside.

"Who was she?"

Her eyes were watchful; Lou said, easily, "Gal named Lee Cayou."

"Where'd you meet her?" Looking at her, Lou thought, I'd think twice before I changed from this one . . .

"Right here."

Mae said severely, "I meant, *before*."

"Haven't met her before."

Mae took a step back. "Don't give me that!"

Now, thought Lou, shall I tell her? Shall I? He said, rather lamely, "Well, you know what these kids are. They get to like a band, and they go for it, pester you—"

"Kids! Pester you!" She was scornful. "She was no kid. Twenty three or four, and *experienced*, I'd say!"

Lou tried to duck the argument ; he knew that whatever Mae said, he wanted—maybe he needed—to meet Lee Cayou again. "Yeah. Well, she just wanted to talk to me. Said she liked the band—" Mae's expression needled him. "Well, hell, the band does have a few fans—"

"You went out with her," Mae said, flatly.

"Sure. Just up the street to the corner, and back again, that's all."

"What did she talk about?"

"Told you, music." He sighed hard, and stood scowling, part of his attention on the fact that his band was into its second number ; that was where he wanted to be.

"That all?"

"Cross my heart."

Tight muted, Paul Tourelle was weaving round 'Sugar,' taken in jig time. Mae put a finger to her lips, then pressed the finger upon Lou's mashed upper. "See you," she said, with a little smile. He climbed back onto the stand, cancelled the last one Willie had picked, called up, 'Tin Roof Blues' and let them into it. He thought. "Okay, Miss Jazz, let's see what you can do for me now!"

She didn't do a thing, and the scowl of self criticism returned. Maybe she was attending to another jazzman ; there were a whole lot who needed help.

His alarm clock roused him at nine thirty a.m. He rubbed his eyes, half sat up, and reached for a cigarette. He was a slow getter up. With the smoke in his lungs, he began to think about the four titles he was scheduled to tape. He had settled upon 'Louisiana,' 'Struttin' With Some Barbecue,' and an original of his own, 'Big Man O'War.' He needed a fourth. What should it be ? He scratched his head, then he dunked his cigarette and reached down for his trumpet case. He stuck a harmon mute in the bell, waggled the valves, and then wondered about it again. Well, why not ? Settle copyright any time. His toes wiggled under the bedclothes as he took the break into the solo chorus of "Scratch My Back." She gave it to Louis, eh ? He closed his eyes, concentrated on the little string of squeezed notes at the end of the chorus, and brought the piece to its flourishing end.

When he opened his eyes, *she* was waiting, sitting on the end of the bed. She seemed even more attractive in the morning light. He put down the horn and gaped.

"Hi, Lou," Lee Cayou said.

"Didn't—hear you come in."

She smiled widely. "Did you expect to? I didn't use the door."

Indignantly, he said, "This is my bedroom."

"I've got eyes."

"No dames allowed. If Mama Gee knew you were here, she'd run me out. And I like this place."

"Afraid?"

"No, but you shouldn't—"

She edged nearer. This was a dish. She had the sort of beauty that could wear flaming colours, outsize earrings and such, and yet there was nothing out of place. It was a vulgar design that was somehow perfectly acceptable. Her perfume was heady. "Lou, you want to work with me?"

"I don't know—"

She put the trumpet in his hand. "What about that number of your own? Satisfied with your solo for it?"

The scowl snapped back. "Satisfied? I'm never satisfied. Only one I like at all is the one I took off the record."

She said, "Listen." She began to hum, her eyes closed, lips parted, head back. She started on an improvisation around the chords of 'Big Man O'War,' and he began to see for the first time the potentialities of his own tune.

"Swell," he breathed.

"Again," she said, and repeated it. On the third time he had his trumpet up, and was following her, and at the fourth, he knew it.

She smiled; "How 'bout that?"

He nodded slowly, wondering, lost in the beauty she was and the beauty she created. "And you want to teach me, Lee?"

She inclined her head. "Want more?"

"Sure I do," he breathed. "Lee, that chorus I just learned, it's like—a bit like another one I remember. Which one am I thinking of?"

"'Singin' the Blues'?"

"Yeah. Bix's chorus!"

She smiled sadly. "Poor Bix. You've got about eight bars of your tune with chords something like that number."

Louis Armstrong, thought Lou, then Bix, and now—me!

She rose, and said, "Meet you downstairs in the restaurant for coffee. Then we'll go and see about those records, hah?"

"Swell."

Lee didn't use the door ; she seemed to walk through it. He did not feel any surprise. Suddenly his mind flooded with thoughts of Mae, and he was resentful. Who was Mae to push him around ?

The Fosco company didn't have a real recording studio ; they had taken a big old stucco-fronted house with a fancy iron balcony, and had it rewalled inside. They didn't pay much and their distribution wasn't good, but it was a start. The studio the Lou Joris Seven used was the biggest of the two, a bare place with foam block insulation and a mastic floor. Under the glaring lights, the rest of the band were ready assembled. The sound engineer, a short character as fresh and as twitchy as a rising seal, had just finished running a balance test on the rhythm section, when Lou came in with Lee. They got a positive audience reaction. Herman Rizotto gave a very low register whistle, and played a few bars of 'Ever Lovin' Woman,' just to show what he thought. Lee flashed them all a smile and found herself a seat.

The musicians whispered.

"Man, who is she ?"

"Saw her at the club, hah ?"

"'I found a new baby—' "

Lou realised that protest was useless, so he cut it short and asked the recordist, "How about a run through the numbers, Al ?"

Al twitched his nose and said, "Okay. Balance you first."

When balance was complete, Al said, casually, "Any time now."

They took 'Big Man O'War' first. It started with eight bars from Willie's clarinet, backed by tom toms and slurping growls from Paul's trombone. Then came the first ensemble chorus, trumpet stabbing at the melody, clarinet decorating and riding high, trombone filling and pointing the harmony changes with practised ease. After a repeat of the clarinet and tom tom eight came the solos—Willie, with brass figures behind, a split thirty two between Paul's sliphorn and Herman's piano, and then a two bar drum break before Lou took it on his own. Lou didn't scowl. He knew that he was playing well that morning; all Lee had taught him was in his mind and he poured it out, golden phrase after golden phrase. At

last came a stump change of key into the last loud and hard riding chorus, and that was it.

When they had finished, there was a hush.

"Man," whispered Willy, "you *is* feeling the spirit this mo'nin'!"

"Wahoo, the old ark's a moverin'!" Herman said.

Pops Henrique remarked, "So *that's* why I go on playing!"

Lou glanced over at Lee, and she smiled and nodded. He rapped, "'Barbecue'; ready?"

They played it; Lou knew that no one could play it without showing his debt to Armstrong, but they weren't too close to the master's glorious work. Then they did 'Louisiana' and 'Scratch My Back.'

A green light glowed. Al's voice came through a speaker from his glass cage. "Run 'em back in a minute."

The band broke it up and chatted and smoked, and Lou came over to Lee and gave her a cigarette. "Well?"

"Not bad—perhaps you'll do better."

He was incredulous. "Than that?"

"Uh huh." She nodded and smiled.

At the piano Herman sat with his big frame hunched, chording 'All of me,' very softly. Lee hummed a phrase, got up, and walked over. Herman looked up and grinned when he heard her humming it.

"Sing it?" he asked.

"Yes."

He spread a chord. "There's your highest note; okay?"

"Right."

Others were coming round, interested. Paul said, "Intro, you take the first chorus, we'll do sixteen of the second, you take the second sixteen to the end, finish. Right?"

Lou, on the other side of the studio, near the control cage, smiled and listened.

"Right," Lee said.

Herman played an intro; bass and drums fell in; Paul and Willy sat close, listening to each other, filling in a background. She sang softly, effortlessly, with long swinging phrases and a soft husky tone. He knew that this girl could sing along with Pearl and Ella and Sarah and outshine them all; she was perfect; *she was jazz*! When she finished he knew that no one had ever made a finer version of that tune.

Al signalled and announced, "Here they come."

Through the speakers came the numbers, pouring out in a perfect playback ; Lee sat close to him, and he felt an electric thrill when her fingers closed upon his own. Tense and joyful, he sat gripping the side of the chair. When they were played he said to Al, with an attempt at being casual, "They'll do." And with a surge, the tension left him.

Al bounced into the studio, all excited. "Do ! Waddya mean ? Mahogany Hall never heard better ! When they're disced, there's four deejays who are going to go for those in a big way !"

Lou was happy ; the musicians, also happy because they'd got it right first take, were packing up. Al said, "Hey I almost forgot. I taped the singer's name on the other kit. Don't know what the balance is like but we'll see—"

They all stopped to listen. Herman's piano intro—a beat from bass and drums—the soft sound of Willie's clarinet and Paul's muted tromb—but no voice, nothing, not a whisper. It seemed eerie ; Lou thought, I think I know why, I think I know ! She's immortal but—

Al switched it off. "Well, I don't get it. She was coming through the 'phones real strong—"

There was an imploring look in her eyes as she gazed hard at Lou. Then he was sure. Al asked, "Would you like to do that again ?"

She made a quick movement. "No, not now. Some other time I guess."

She moved to the door. Lou followed her into the short corridor. From the smaller studio came the sound of a piano.

They went outside into the bright sunlight, pausing for a moment at the entrance. She said, "Thanks."

"For what ?"

"You know."

"Wasn't anything ; I—guessed your limitation. Why did you have to sing at all ?"

Her eyes flashed. "You ask *me* that !"

"Sorry, Lee."

"Forget it."

A big built, handsome Creole man, in a pale biscuit suit and carrying a music case, was standing just behind them, lighting a cigarette. He looked up and nodded, and when he saw Lee he straightened and then said, stepping forward, "Hi, Lou."

Lou watched his approach with some distaste. This was Eddie Comer, who played piano in a place farther down Teak Street, Lou had never been very friendly with him. Lou answered warily.

Comer came and stood close, his eyes on Lee. "Well, introduce me."

Lou, his scowl rising, did the honours. Lee said, "I've heard of you ; good things. Were you recording?"

"Yeah. With my trio, bass and guitar, and our singer. She ain't bad." Eddie Comer continued to gaze down at her from his extra foot of height and Lou found himself resenting the possessiveness which was somehow implied in the painist's manner. And Lee was free with her smiles . . .

When they parted, she took Lou's arm as they walked down the street. She said, "He's handsome."

"He's a louse. He's on tea, too."

She raised an eyebrow. "Does it matter? Nothing I can do about it."

"Guy ought to be able to play without that stuff. Still, maybe you just don't condemn anybody. There's only one thing matters to you. You're in a special position." Then he thought of something else. "Suppose we go and do this—practice, at the club?"

"Can't that Mama Gee let you have a room with a piano?"

"Yeah—but—you see, Mae's in the habit of calling round."

"She plays intermission piano?"

"That's right."

"What's she want?"

Lou felt awkward. "Well—me, I guess. She's sort of attached, and I'm fond of her. So, you see—let's make it the club."

She agreed. He was aware of the admiring glances of passers by. He said, "Let's eat first ; or do you? I forgot."

She laughed and said, "I'll come and look as if I do."

The only light in the club was the one over the band stage. Lou sat in a chair at the edge of it, and Lee was at the piano. They had been there an hour and a half, and Lou was feeling flat. He had never been given such a going over in his life. She had begun by bawling him out for not knowing the difference between a harmonic minor and a melodic minor scale. She had shown him that his power dropped much too much once he got above C over middle C. Her tender black

eyes became hard and critical. "Lou, jazz isn't ignorant any more. You need all the old stuff, and as much musical knowledge as you can get. And you *don't* have all you should. Try it again, like this." She ran over the scale on the piano. He played, and fluffed it. She played it again, and he followed, feeling his lip beginning to ache through all this concentration. Then he put down his horn and lit a cigarette. "I don't get it, Lee. All this basic stuff. If I think of a phrase, I can play it. What more do you want?" His scowl came blackly, and he stared at the floor. It was humid in the club; sounds of traffic came faintly, and he thought of other warm afternoons when he and Mae . . .

"Are you crazy?" There was a sharp tone in Lee's voice. "You've been worrying about the way some of your phrases don't seem to flow. This is why! Come on, you can take some more. Let's hear you start a set at the top of your range . . ." She muttered, "what more do *I* want! Man, you're the one who's wanting!"

He played some more. Soon, the simple truth began to sink in that he, Lou Joris, not-quite-top-flight jazzman, was being given a chance to get to the top, and he must take that chance. Only . . .

Two arms stole round him. She whispered, "Lou, honey, you worked hard." He turned, and they kissed; it was all he had imagined; somewhere a door creaked.

Mae's voice said, "Mama Gee said that you might be here—" and then she stopped, and she came clicking down the stairs onto the floor. "Joris!" she snapped, "you rat."

There was a heavy glass ashtray on one of the nearby tables. She picked it up and flung it with more force than accuracy. They ducked; it went high, hitting the drapes at the back of the stage and clattering down with a thud and a roll. Mae stood with her hands on her hips and her eyes blazing; Lee seemed unmoved. Mae advanced upon Lou, catlike. "Start explaining!" she rapped. "You walk out last night, you do a recording this morning and invite her, and now I find you here, lovin' and all! Well?" She snapped her fingers with a hard little sound.

Lou stammered, "Mae, it was a business arrangement. Strictly business. See Cindy's been thinking that maybe we need a singer—"

"I can see, *Mister Joris*, what sort of a business it is!" And she upped and slapped him, hard. Then she turned to

address a few remarks to Lee, but she and Lou were the only people in the club. He saw her amazed face, knew the spot he was in, and came near to telling her the truth.

"Where did she—" began Mae, and then snorted and ran up the stairs. A door slammed. Lou thought that he had never felt so lonely in his life. He put away his trumpet, and left the club, slowly. The sunshine outside hit him like a curse.

Every musician has his off nights, and, dependent upon what instrument he plays, it shows up more or less to the customers. A clarinetist usually lets go so many notes that a few sour ones can pass; a trombonist can cut down on his solo work and stay in the ensemble, but if a trumpet player is feeling off he might just as well put away his horn and get quietly drunk. Nothing can disguise the clinkers that the lead horn plays. And Lou had an off night; his scowl got blacker and blacker, and his mind tightened as it whirled round his desire to be a better player, to do right by Mae, to have the band as he wanted it, to see if he could do something about getting his band on that TV series.

When he finished a number on A just above the stave, when he normally finished with a high F, he knew that the bugs had got him. Herman's empty piano chair didn't help; the pianist hadn't shown up, and he didn't know why. He did know, though, that he was sick at heart, that he was letting his band down, and also that some of the customers were looking at him rather curiously.

"'Loveless Love'," he told the band, and beat four. The rhythm sounded fuller, and when he had played the lead in the first two choruses, he looked and saw that it was not Herman playing, but Mae. She didn't look at him. He called up two more, and then they had a short break. She stared at him as though he was a stranger, and said, "Herman's sick. He sent his boy round to tell me, asked me if I'd do it for him. I said yes."

He felt a rush of gratitude. "Thanks Mae—"

Icily, she said, "I don't mind helping Herman."

It was a bringdown, that remark. Lou called up three more tunes, and played badly in every one of them. He could have thrown down his horn and danced on it. From the floor, close to the bandstage, a voice remarked coolly, "I'm wasting my time, huh?"

It was Lee. She wore a dress of shimmering green ; long pendant earrings sparkled, and her lovely skin glowed. She looked mad. "I'll work on you, Lou Joris," she said. "I'll take you apart and I'll put you together again so that you tick right, all the time !"

That was where Mae walked up and caught Lee a resounding smack on the face. "Leave him alone !" she ordered loudly, and followed up her first assault with a neat left hook that didn't quite land as she had intended. The noise in the club dropped a few decibels ; Lee stepped back, and Cindy started off towards them, just as Lee swung her vanity bag at Mae's head. Then Lou's girl went in for close quarter work ; she leaped at Lee, got hold of her thick hair in two handfuls and bore her to the floor ; there was a high tearing sound as Lee's overtight skirt was ruined.

"I'd have you know—" squealed Mae, "that I don't—" bump of head on floor, "—want you around—" bump again—and then she stopped because Cindy Laverne was there, and Cindy could handle it. She had Mae's arm behind her back, and had her on her feet in judo time. Somebody started to applaud the way it was done. It spread, and laughter joined it.

Cindy snapped, "Go home Mae, now." She turned to Lou ; "Go on, play something. Do without her !"

Upset, Lou picked three numbers, but he hadn't the heart to play in any of them. As the band started, he saw Lee walk off in the direction of the powder room. An evening without a pianist, and without Mae. At that moment he found himself wishing that he'd never seen a trumpet, or a woman, in his life.

The next afternoon he walked down the stairs into the empty club. She was waiting under the single light over the bandstage. He had good news, he had bad. It was good that the TV company had said in a letter that morning that they would send a representative to hear his band ; it was good that the organisers of the Southern Festival of Music and Drama had asked him to be one of the bands in the jazz concert. But here he was walking down these stairs to Lee Cayou. Was that good ? He felt guilty, frustrated, his thinking clouded by a web of anger and indecision which he couldn't shake off. Why didn't he say the hell with it, and

take all she offered, without any reservations, with no other thought except his own need ?

He said, "They were your doing, weren't they ?"

"The concert letter, and the TV letter ? I helped."

He went to get his horn. He took it out of its case and he said, "I thought it was you."

"You knew I'd be here ?"

Hating himself a little, he said, "I hoped you would be."

"Still want to learn ?"

"I'm here," Lou said. "I wondered about last night—if you'd come."

"Means nothing." Her husky voice bounced with a soft echo in the empty place. She sounded tender, and it seemed to make him feel easier.

Soon, that beguiling tenderness of hers was gone, and in its place was the tough, dominating woman he had met before and had hardly recognised as Lee Cayou. She was a slave driver. Apart from the exercises which he hadn't done for years, she showed him conclusively that his attack was sluggish, his tone production was poor, and that sometimes he was even off pitch. At the end of an hour, he was feeling rough. He said, "That's fine, Lee. That enough for now ?"

"Can't take any more ?" Her voice was hard.

"Now, listen—"

"Listen to *me*, you big fish in a little pond ! You can do this, and you will ! Brother, if you want to move off this heap, you gotta work !" She rose abruptly. "Okay. Enough for now. See you tomorrow !"

And, in a moment, she was not there at all.

The succeeding week was nightmarish. His practice sessions under Lee's ruthless supervision became longer and longer ; Mae refused to call on him, or even to speak, and once when he did manage to get her cornered she slapped his face and offered to kick him if he didn't get out of her way. So, he cleared. He played his evening stints in an aura of stiff concentration. Before, he had regretted his slips and fluffs but seldom felt really bad about them ; but now, they oppressed him. Lee was a tigress for perfection ; she groomed every nuance, she showed him a hundred ways of approaching the same chord sequence. she battered him through scales and arpeggios, attack and tonguing exercises until his head reeled. She took nothing for granted, she gave little or no praise ;

she was a beautiful nagging shrew of a woman who loved music, and only music, as only an immortal could. And if Lou Joris wanted to be up there with the gods of jazz, then he must go her way.

Lee had admitted that he was making progress ; he believed her, but his mind felt stiff with the mass of new things learned and old faults corrected. That was not all ; she had been driving, driving, driving at him over the numbers he had picked to play in the Festival concert. She had drummed into him improvisations that were the purest jazz poetry ; the whole concert was being taped, and once this stuff got out on records, the *Belle Marie* would, she said, no longer be able to hold the Lou Joris Seven. Lee had a smack at everything, including Mae Becique. "She'll be nowhere near your standard when I've done with you, Lou. She plays piano real sloppy ; what good's she to a man who is going to the top ? You better be free of her."

Lou looked at nothing, said nothing. She saw this, and put an arm round his neck. "You want me, don't you ?"

"What do you think ?"

"Let's hear a solo lead in for 'Save It Pretty Momma.'"

He played one ; she hit the damndest chord on the piano and her eyes flashed. "For God's sake ! That one's got two left feet ! How about this ?" She made some phrases ; she seemed to take about the same notes that he did, but there were subtleties of accentation and attack which made all the difference.

"Now try."

He did it again.

"No, no ! *Listen*, Lou !"

At the fourth time, it was something like. His smile was a shade forced. "Thanks, Lee. I guess I got it now."

"You *should*." Her tone might have held a faint hint of disgust. "Now, let's run through the trumpet stuff for all six numbers of the concert." She sat with her slim hands poised over the keys.

"Don't you ever feel tired ?" he asked, and he knew that she never did. Hell, no, she had marched with Buddy Bolden ! She was immortal !

She crashed a chord, and stood with her eyes blazing. "Joris !" she said, in a low voice, "we'll go through those numbers." She came and took him by the shoulders. "Mister I'm right behind you. You think it's only your reputation

on show here ? Mine is too ! I got a lot of shares in the new Lou Joris, and they'd better pay off. Let's go !"

Lou was a jerky, worried, irritable character now. He snapped when people asked him who his new chick was, he gave savage answers to the most innocent questions; and folks were a little awestruck at the class of jazz he was currently playing. At the same time, all those who knew him would willingly have traded it for the better natured, easier-going Lou of former days. Once, they had felt that he was one of them ; now he seemed remote, sunk in his own thoughts and imaginings, and there was nothing they could do about it.

Five minutes before they were due to go to their places on the back half of the revolving stage at the Municipal Auditorium, Herman Rizotto hadn't shown. Lou paced, lips drawn tightly, glaring at the floor.

Willie Heeler said, trying to comfort, " We played without piano before."

Lou snapped. " We got it all set, haven't we ? It's special. And what about the recording ? Do we want to sound less than perfect ? We'll withdraw."

Paul Tourelle came in and said, " Your girl's out front, Lou."

Lou nearly asked, " Which girl ?" and then didn't, because he knew that he couldn't have stood the laugh that it would have got. His stomach was a tight knot ; his brain was full of worry, going over the things that they were going to play. In the ordinary way, he wouldn't have come within a mile of worrying, but now, things were different. It was tough getting to the top, would it be as tough to stay there ?

He opened the door to a knock, and there was Mae Becique. She looked beautiful, but everyone became silent, wondering, what now ; *she's his used-to-be—what now ?*

Mae spoke coldly. " Herman's stomach is giving him hell again. He sent round, asked me to deputise. Got his parts ?"

" Mae," began Lou, and went towards her. The look in her eye stopped him ; he thought she might spit.

" I'm doing this for Herman Rizotto, and no one else," she said crisply. " Gimme his parts !"

He handed them to her. A steward came and said, " Lou Joris Seven ? In places, please."

No more was said ; they went up the corridor and mounted the stage, on the other side of which a powerhouse band was rocking out its last number. The big band finished, and then the master of ceremonies announced them. Lou sought to catch Mae's eye, but she was looking down at the keyboard. He thought, my boss is out there, listening to every damn thing I play, taking apart each phrase, twitching at every note that's the least bit sour. I'm playing for her vanity, her mountain-size ego. She doesn't want me, she wants my music, she wants me to give back to her what she's taught me. The music is what *she* rates high, but with Mae, I'm the one that counts—or used to count . . . The announcement ended.

Lou had never had the crawlers in his stomach before, but he had them now ; they were crawling as he beat in a swift four for 'Big Butter And Egg Man.' As he played, he had an eye on Mae, and felt himself free to notice, as though for the first time in years, how good she was to look at. And her piano playing *didn't* sound sloppy. He was playing, leading the tearing ensemble, and he thought, she needn't have come, she could have sent another dep, she could . . . at the precise moment when, fortunately, he was able to stop playing, a stunning realisation hit him. He had been looking at Mae all the time, not thinking about what was coming out of the horn. He had played hardly a bar of the solo which Lee Cayou had taught him, and, by the noise that the audience was making the band had gone over big. He had been looking at Mae, and he felt utterly, completely free !

So, with the next number, and the next, he played what came naturally, the kind of stuff he used to play, and he hoped, hoped hard, that the two women in his life would get the message. The next number, and the next, were well applauded, and with each solo piece he deserted more and more the things he learned from Lee Cayou, threw them overboard and let his ideas, *his* ideas, come freely ! He didn't *need* what she had given him ! A small thought nagged that he couldn't take what she had given him, but he ignored it. He couldn't see Lee from where he was, but, during other men's solos, he managed to make Mae look at him. Once, he thought she smiled. The audience liked the band, no doubt about it. What was *she* thinking about, down there ?

With a rush of courage, he decided to make it plain to her, plain beyond all doubt just what he felt. For the last number

he turned to the band and called, "Cancel 'Scratch My Back'; we'll play 'South Rampart Street.'" They were good men. They didn't bat an eyelid, and the Lou Joris Seven roared into the grand old tune with all the power they had.

He was talking to Mae afterwards, in the street just outside the hall. The crowd had gone, and they were alone in the lamplight, with the breeze that came whispering along from the river.

"And that's really all over, Lou?"

"Cross my heart," Lou said, fervently. He wouldn't tell her that Lee Cayou was an immortal. He wouldn't tell her of the crashing discovery he had made about himself. Part of being a good man consists in knowing *how much* to tell a good woman.

"I figured," she said, "that if I came and played, I might give myself away. Lou, I've been so lonely. Seeing you every night and not speaking . . . I could tell by the way you played tonight that something was different."

Lou smiled; the fact that Mae was talking to him again, that she still loved him, was the balm that he needed. Balm, that was it, balm to the searing knowledge that he, Lou Joris, was not of the stuff from which truly top flight jazzmen are made; he just didn't have that kind of greatness. He was a good musician, with a good band, and he had a good woman who loved him. That would have to be enough. He had had his taste of immortality, and he didn't like it.

Mae gave a little exclamation, and he looked along the street; into the rays of the lamp strolled Lee Cayou, alone. She was not alone for long; a moment later, she was joined by a tall figure. She took his arm, and they turned and walked off.

"That's her; with Eddie Comer. The tramp!"

"Tramp." He savoured the word. "I guess that just about says it." He took her arm. They strolled in the warm darkness. "Mae, don't ever ask me why there are so few top *women* jazz musicians; I know the answer to that one."

—John Kippax

CAN DO

BY GEORGE WHITLEY

There are cans in the larder, there are cans in the space under the sink, there are more cartons of cans under the kitchen table. There are cans in the bathroom, cans on the balcony, cans in the wardrobe and cans under the bed. They are all cans of the same commodity and each one bears on its label the portrait of a stout, smiling gentleman wearing a fez, and a few lines of that ornamental but, to Western eyes, non-functional Arabic script. In English are the words: EL KANTARA SARDINES. PRODUCT OF THE GREATER EGYPT CANNERY. You may remember seeing them, some time ago, in quite a few of the chain stores and supermarkets. For some reason the line has been discontinued. I can guess why.

We—Sandra and myself—are not sardine addicts. We hate sardines—the sight of them, the smell of them, the taste of them. There was a time once when we rather liked the odd sardine now and again, but that's not now. And yet, night after night, we munch our way grimly through our hoard. We could, of course, throw the contents of each can away as we opened it—but there's a lot of money tied up in those damned tinned fish. It wouldn't be so bad if we had a cat, but we haven't. Sandra is allergic to the brutes. There's only one bright spot in the whole sorry business; we have a very efficient can opener . . .

It all started one Friday afternoon when I was doing the weekend shopping. Sandra works—she is assistant manager

of a ladies' clothing factory—I don't. Women, for some odd reason, never regard the beating of a typewriter as work. As I am at home all day I am in charge of the commissariat. I do the shopping and, except at the weekends, I do the cooking. I used to do the cooking, I mean.

This Friday afternoon I finished the sea story that I was working on and, having made out my shopping list, collected a carrier bag from the kitchen and left the flat. On the way to the shopping centre I remembered that I had eaten the last can of sardines for my lunch, made a mental note to replace it. I wish now that I'd forgotten!

I was able to do all the shopping in the local supermarket. Eggs, bacon, butter. French bread. A plump young rabbit for that evening's dinner. (He was *good*, that rabbit! I think of him with a decided nostalgia). Celery, lettuce, tomatoes. Potatoes. Flour. Vinegar.

And sardines.

On the shelves devoted to canned fish there were the usual sild and brislings from Canada and Norway, the real sardines from Portugal. Then, a couple of pennies cheaper than any of the others, there were the Egyptian sardines. I hesitated at first; after all, Egypt is not outstanding among the world's nations in matters of hygiene. But Sandra is always preaching economy and the necessity for living within one's income and, furthermore, it was highly improbable that this line of goods would ever have been allowed into the country had there been any official doubts as to its wholesomeness.

So I took a tin, added it my other purchases in the wire basket, proceeded to the cash desk, paid and transferred the shopping to the carrier bag. When I got home I put the various items in the larder or the refrigerator, with the exception of the rabbit. Him I prepared for baking.

Sandra was home shortly afterwards, putting on her usual poor-little-working-girl act. I rallied round with the usual efficiency, producing the sherry and cigarettes, and then we settled down to discuss the events of the day. I heard all about the stupidity of foremen and forewomen and all the managerial staff but Sandra, I told her how the latest story had gone.

Then a little later than she usually did, she asked, "What's for dinner?"

"Rabbit," I told her.

"Good," she said.

"I was thinking," I remarked, "that we could have what's left cold on Sunday evening. You can make one of your special salads."

"We shall want some sardines," she said.

"I got some more," I assured her. "Rather interesting, actually. It looks as though Colonel Nasser has taken a leaf from Marshall Tito's book."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, the Yugo-Slavs tried to muscle into the canned anchovy racket. The Egyptians seem to be doing the same with sardines."

"*Egyptian* sardines?" she demanded incredulously.

"Why not? The sardine's a Mediterranean fish. Come to that, I've had dried sardines with my beer in Port Said."

She was convinced when I showed her the tin, and she agreed with me that, after all, it was more outre than Japanese crab or Russian salmon.

The rabbit, as I have said, was good. Saturday's meals were good too. There was nothing special about them, they were just what we used to consider our normal weekend feeding—griddle cakes for breakfast, hot dogs in the local beer garden for lunch, all sorts of exotic bits and pieces at our favourite Indonesian restaurant for dinner. Sunday's meals—until the evening—followed the same pleasant routine. There were hot scones with honey for breakfast, toasted egg and bacon sandwiches at midday. Had we known, we should have enjoyed them all so much more than we did.

It was on Sunday evening that it happened.

Sandra went through to the kitchen to prepare her special salad. She couldn't find the sardines, called to me to get them for her. I opened the larder door, lifted them down from the top shelf. There was the usual key attached to the tin by a dab of solder. I broke it off and was about to open the can for her when she stopped me.

"I'm the cook," she said. "You go back to your crossword puzzle."

"It's time you did some cooking, anyhow," I told her.

Some little time later I heard her mutter, "*Blast* this key!" I sympathised with her. Very few cans can be opened successfully with the tools provided. A second or so later I heard her scream. I assumed that she had cut her finger on a jagged

edge of metal—as, in fact, was the case—got up and ran through to the kitchen to administer first aid.

Sandra fell into my arms.

“Look !” she said. “Look !”

From the tear in the tin a black smoke—thick, oily—was billowing. As we watched, frozen with terror, it assumed human form—or more or less human form. The red eyes glared down at us, the tusked mouth spoke. The words were like the rumble of not so distant thunder.

“To my liberator,” it said, “I owe a wish. What is your wish, oh liberator ?”

I wanted to prompt Sandra, but I couldn’t speak. All I could do was to stare at that djinn or marid—I’m inclined to think that it must have been a marid, bearing in mind the nature of its prison—and wait for her to say the magic words that would bring us fame and fortune.

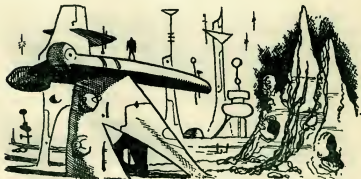
She made her wish—and that is why we have bought up as much as we could of what remained of that line of Egyptian sardines. “Where there’s one djinn,” she reasoned, “there’s bound to be another.”

She made her wish—and the djinn replied smartly, “Can do !” gratified it in a split second and then vanished forever.

She made her wish—and in extenuation it must be said that her gashed finger was hurting like hell.

“Bring me,” she ordered, “a decent can opener.”

—George Whitley



*The trouble is that you never can be
sure of anyone—not even your wife—as
Brian Aldiss soliloquises.*

ARE YOU AN ANDROID ?

By BRIAN W. ALDISS

Perhaps even readers of science fiction magazines fail to realise how rapidly science is overtaking fiction. Take the field of synthesised molecules, for instance. Over a million molecules are now known to scientists by name, if not by Christian name. Their ranks are being added to at the rate of about thirty thousand a year. Plastics which simulate human skin are already on the market.

I am not happy about this.

The science of cybernetics is advancing with equally rapid strides. By now it is possible to duplicate many of the functions of the human brain. Artificial eyes can be made to see, artificial limbs can be made to move, artificial hands can be made to reach out . . . No, it's too much ! Couple these developments with the new plastics, and you realise why I am worried.

The day of the android has dawned.

Already it is possible to make a robot, a horrible thing of steel and plastic, which will outwardly resemble a human being. Inside, its purposes will be alien. And tucked below the solar plexus . . . a bomb triggered to explode at a fatal key phrase, perhaps ?

This idea occurred to me a few evenings ago, after supper. I mentioned it to my wife. She only laughed, nodded mechanically, and went on reading.

There was something about the way she did it . . . I sat in my chair staring at her, the first terrible suspicions growing in my mind. Supposing . . . No, it couldn't be . . . But *supposing* . . . I fought with the idea, but in the end it beat me. After all, you never know with women.

It seemed an unworthy suspicion to hold of one's wife. As I see it, though, the menace is a very real one, and the more sinister because the suspect herself may have no knowledge of her true identity. Ask yourself this question: if you were an android robot, *how would you know you were?*

For hours on end, I worried about the matter. It obsessed me. I lay wakeful all night, not even falling into that light, exhausting sleep which only lack of H*rl*cks can bring. Finally I decided that anything was better than not knowing the truth about my wife. So the next day I carried out certain tests designed to settle the fearful question conclusively one way or the other.

For the benefit of anyone confronted by the same sort of dilemma, a report of this experiment follows.

Aldiss stands uneasily just inside the front door, fingering his tie and peering through the frosted glass panel in the door. His wife, who has popped out to the grocer's to buy some flour, is just coming back through the front gate. Aldiss has taken advantage of her absence to conceal a weighing machine under the front door mat.

If she trips lightly in and clocks up five tons while wiping her feet, he is going at once to phone up Interpol.

The wife enters, very smiling and bonny. She weighs no more than a human might be expected to weigh. Nevertheless, Aldiss's fears remain: he knows about the wonders wrought with light metal alloys these days. The more he thinks about it, the more incriminating it seems that she should weigh only a usual amount; she obviously has something to hide.

"Are you feeling all right, dear?" she asks.

Aldiss nods dumbly, not helping her to remove her coat. His wife is looking very attractive, her complexion flawless and not a hair out of place. The total effect is a little unnatural—after all, a high wind is blowing outside. He resolves to try the second test.

"You are looking lovely this afternoon," he says, grinning with feral cunning. "Do come over here to the light, and let me examine your beautiful skin under this microscope."

"I can't stop now, snooks," the wife replies brightly. "I'm just going to make some scones for tea. You can lay the tea things, if you like."

This speech has been recorded on the tape recorder which Aldiss craftily concealed behind a cushion and a copy of the *Radio Times*. Aldiss plays it back to himself several times when his wife has left the room. He thinks he detects in it a hint of alien psychology; surely no human being would suggest that laying a tea table was something a man might like doing?

Creeping to the kitchen door, he peeps round it to see whether sultanas or iron filings are going into the scone mix, and then leaps out on his wife with what would be a blood-curdling yell if one had blood.

"Oh," she exclaims, dropping the bag of flour, "you really frightened me!"

"Yes, indeed. And did I not hear a relay or two click as you jumped?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" the wife exclaims indignantly. "It must have been the fridge ticking over."

Beyond pulling a doubtful face, Aldiss makes no reply to this. He hangs about in the kitchen, pretending to look for woodworm in the wallpaper, until his wife takes the scones over to the oven. Selecting a point of vantage, he scrutinises this operation carefully.

Unnerved by the sight of her husband glaring at her from on top of the draining board, the wife burns her finger as she lights the gas. Aldiss jumps down, instantly solicitous.

"Your synchronisation must have gone off phase just for a second," he observes, sympathetically. "Let me look at your finger. Do I smell burning rubber?"

He examines her finger doubtfully, finally biting it.

"You callous wretch!" the wife exclaims, pushing him away. "I've asked you before not to try the old Adam on me when I'm busy. Don't you ever think about anything else? Now please get out of the kitchen until tea's ready."

Aldiss retreats, crestfallen but undeterred. He thinks he almost has his wife where he wants her; the next hour will

decide. By the time the tea is served, he has the final part of his campaign all planned.

Standing on a chair behind the dining room door, he tips itching powder down his wife's back as she enters with the teapot.

"You lunatic ! Now what are you up to ?" she exclaims angrily, spilling scalding tea down Aldiss's leg.

"Nothing, nothing ; just dusting the picture rail." His innocent expression is a masterly disguise, but she is not to be mollified.

"Really, you treat me sometimes as if I wasn't human !" she says.

"You can say that again," he remarks, so softly that she does not hear. She sets the hot scones on the table, and then begins to scratch her back. The itching powder is taking effect. Aldiss is disappointed at this ; he thought her plastic back would be insensitive to tickles. She says she must go upstairs and change her clothes.

"What's the matter ?" Aldiss insinuates challengingly. "Has a fuse blown or something ?"

"Your imagination is overheated," his wife replies. "You have been reading too much science fiction, my boy. Only the night before last you woke up screaming something about Pohl and Kornbluth."

"No, no," he says quick-wittedly. "I was saying 'Poland corn bluff.' It was a sort of political-agricultural nightmare ; I've had a whole lot of that kind lately."

The wife goes upstairs to change her clothes ; Aldiss begins to follow, but she stops him. He protests that he only wants to see if she still has that mole on her left hip, but she says she has heard that one before. Aldiss returns to the tea table and slips a steel scone onto his wife's plate.

His wife enters five minutes later, wearing the pink twin set he gave her last Christmas. Sitting down, she immediately detects the spurious scone.

"Joke buns at your age !" she exclaims. "What is the matter with you ? I think you need an overhaul from the—er—the doctor."

Aldiss jumps up.

"Ha ! You nearly gave yourself away then. You nearly said 'mechanic,' didn't you ?"

His wife is alarmed now. "Darling, have you got some extraordinary idea that I am—well, a robot or something? You have, haven't you? You'll have to go into a mental home if this goes on."

"Yes, anything to keep me quiet. Don't think I don't see through your game. I dare you to eat one of these scones you cooked!"

Angrily, the wife picks up one of the scones and begins munching it.

"You see," she says, with her mouth full, "I have every intention of eating my own—"

A fit of choking and coughing makes her break off. Aldiss is triumphant. He thinks he has revealed her in her true colours at last.

"A crumb has gone down into your soundbox and amplifying circuits, hasn't it?" he gloats, reaching for the phone and dialling Scotland Yard. Between coughs, his wife implores him to put the receiver down, but he is adamant.

"Why not admit it?" he asks her. "Say 'I am a robot.'"

Hopelessly, she repeats "I—am—a—," and at once springs apart. Nearly five thousand, four hundred miscellaneous parts, including valves, transistors, skin, sprockets and wires, burst about the room. The scones are ruined.

"Is that Scotland Yard?" Aldiss asks into the phone, when a metallic voice speaks. "I want you to come round here at once."

"You'll never get away with this, Aldiss," the voice at the other end whispers. "We haven't kept tabs on you for nothing! You're surrounded. We know who you are."

"You mean," he says in puzzlement, "you mean I—am—a—"

Aldiss springs apart.

—Brian W. Aldiss

Hek Belov, the world's foremost cyberneticist, is back with us again and up to his ears in trouble—not the least being a robot diagnoser for advertising. Who diagnoses what and how you will discover in Edward Mackin's latest piece of humour.

THE DIAGNOSER

BY EDWARD MACKIN

Someone once said that poverty is a state of mind. Well, friends, it was in this mindless state that I wandered into Emilio Batti's restaurant one cold, March morning, with the heat strips under the walkways on half power because of the new economy drive.

Emilio was standing behind the old-fashioned counter, slicing boiled ham with an enormous knife. He wasn't very big as giants go. Just six-foot-three, and a mere twenty stone. I felt there should be a beanstalk somewhere, because my original twelve stone had been scaled down to ten over the last six months, which—I regret to say—is what I had been doing—six months.

"Fee fi fo fum!" I said. "Emilio, you fat devil, how are you?"

"Hah!" he bellowed. "Belov! What have you been doing all this time? Working maybe?"

He laughed so that his enormous bulk shook like a ton-and-a-half of Government goo—staple 40, if you insist—which is

what a lot of people live on nowadays. Very nutritious, of course, but as appetising as china clay.

"No, my friend," I replied. "A shameful thing has happened. I have been in gaol. The Government accused old Belov of wrecking a million-pounds-worth of electronic gear.* Computers, and suchlike rubbish. Tcha ! It wasn't true, of course. I only wrecked half-a-million-pounds-worth, and that wasn't my fault.

"Look at me, Emilio, old friend. You see before you a broken man. A walking skeleton. My clothes hang on me. Not only that. There is the mental anguish. Prison, I have no need to tell you, has little effect on the moronic, or the insensitive ; but it sacrifices the souls of greater men. In short, Emilio, I have suffered."

"The food was no good, huh ?" he said.

"Precisely," I said, clicking my teeth at him. "They cooked it in waste bins, old friend, and stirred it with a shovel. I found an old, brown sock in my stew one day, and when I complained all the guard said was : 'What are you grumbling about ? Don't you like the colour ?' I didn't. It clashed with the grey potatoes."

I shuddered at the memory.

"My dear old friend," I said, coaxingly. "Have you such a thing as a T-bone steak, or a porter-house steak, or any other kind of steak done in your own inimitable manner ? And have you a large, cherry pie ?"

He leaned over the counter towards me. He had an expansive smile on his great, red face. He looked rather like a stores Santa. What a man ! What a friend ! A veritable mountain of generosity.

"Ave a cheese sandwich," he invited.

Have you ever known such a lousy cheapstake ?

"May I be struck by lightning if I do !" I told him.

"Okay," he said, grinning. "You get your lunch, Belov ; but no more until you 'ave paid something off your bill, huh ? Twenty-nine-pounds-seven-and-fourpence you still owe me. The way things are that is very nearly cutting into my capital. Also I like to save a little for my old age. It is a whim of mine. Perhaps I may still want to eat something that doesn't taste like stewed earthworms."

"China clay," I corrected.

"Since you 'ave been in gaol we 'ave staple 41," explained Emilio. "It 'as the improved flavour." He turned towards the kitchen. "Rosie!" he bellowed. "Take Mr. Belov's order."

A great man. I have never said otherwise.

I had just finished my meal, and was draining the last of my coffee, when a hand dropped on my shoulder. This always gives me the shivers. I flipped over some possibilities in my mind, and decided that it was probably the tri-di video, and the genuine Persian carpet, made from real wool, with plastic backing. I'd eaten them both, in a manner of speaking. What long memories the swine have! I had nearly forgotten about the transaction. I glanced up, warily.

"Mr. Belov, I take it?" hazarded the tall man at my elbow.

"He just left," I told him. "If you hurry you'll catch him before he gets around the corner. He's a small man with a long, white beard."

"But Mr. Batti just pointed you out to me as Hek Belov."

"Sorry," I apologised. "I thought you said Smith. Anyway, the video never arrived, and the Persian carpet was crawling. It had holes in it as big as your fist. I had to have it destroyed."

"I don't know what you are talking about," he said, irritably. "I am the manager of Granko Products. We manufacture drugs, and patent medicines. You were recommended to me by a man named Meerschraft. He said he was too busy to take the job on himself and, in any case, it called for a try-anything Charlie rather than a first-class cyberneticist. His words, Mr. Belov, not mine. My name, by the way, is Ross. John Ross."

"My dear Mr. Ross," I said, "Meerschraft is, I assure you, nothing but a moron. A miserable moron. He couldn't fix a bead abacus without a step-by-step instruction book. You're lucky you found me. You might have been swindled by that slimy toad. As it is you have come to the world's greatest cyberneticist. Whatever it is I can do it."

"Good," he said. "Actually, what we want is a diagnoser and treatment purveyor as a sort of advertising gimmick."

"Marvellous," I said. "But wouldn't it be easier to employ a doctor?"

"A doctor is hardly a gimmick," he frowned. "In any case, the Association wouldn't allow it."

"Well," I told him, "you'd need a special computer, of course. The thing would have to be practically human. It would set your firm back at least half-a-million pounds, and it probably wouldn't recommend a single one of your products."

"What a comedian!" said John Ross, with a faint, sad smile. "I'd like to see the chief's face when you tell him that. He wasn't thinking of spending more than a hundred pounds, including your fee."

"God bless him!" I said. "No wonder Meerschraft wouldn't tackle the job."

"I know it's a bit much," admitted the manager. "But it was my idea in the first place. Sales are falling, and I would have been out on my ear if I hadn't come up with something new. You see, there was this robot diagnoser that Miz Granko the present owner's father, had been working on for years. It was a white elephant as far as I knew; but seeing it there gave me the idea. George Granko shoved it right back in my lap, as I might have expected him to do. He's a very mean man. If I don't get this thing in some kind of working order it looks as though I shall be looking for another job shortly."

He spread his hands in a hopeless gesture.

"There's an epidemic of sore eyes just now, my friend," I told him. "Hang on, or you'll be wearing dark glasses."

He sat back, glumly.

"What about a two-way talkie-talkie?" I suggested. "How would that do? Someone in another room to listen, and prescribe whatever muck seems appropriate."

He shook his head.

"I could rig that myself," he said, "and it wouldn't fool a child. What the old man was thinking of was a kind of robot with answers built in. The kind of thing old Miz was working on."

"Nothing elaborate," I said. "Just a robot with all the answers for a hundred pounds including my fee." I snapped my teeth at him. "Goodbye! When you see your boss spit in his eye for me."

"You could at least have a look at this thing I mentioned," he protested. "Old Miz spent half his lifetime on it. It was supposed to be an electronic doctor, and it appears to incorporate a small computer. I have some of his notebooks here."

He pulled three slim, black-bound books from his inside pocket, and passed them to me. I glanced through one. It was full of equations, and strange hieroglyphics, interspersed with the signs of the zodiac. I didn't bother with the others. Mathematics give me indigestion in an acute form.

It was a simple world until some idiot discovered how many beans make five. His scream of triumph can still be heard through the roar of the intercontinental rockets, and the whine of the roof-hopping para-flivs, filled with yelling cavs and doxies with their huge hats, and ridiculous ringlets.

But maths combined with astrology is an abomination. It is a way of seeing around corners that aren't there. I felt queer, I can tell you. I handed the books back to Mr. Ross.

"What happened to him?" I inquired. "Did he vanish in a puff of smoke?"

"No. He took some nauseating concoction for his rheumatism, and shrivelled up like a prune, dying from excessive de-hydration. Old Miz was a martyr to medical science. He was always trying things out on himself."

"All hail!" I said. "And a ton of medals. But the world is probably safer without him. I'll take that job. I need the money to have my head examined, or perhaps my stomach, for even considering it. Still, one has to live."

The manager drew some treasury notes from his pocket.

"Perhaps you'd like a little something on account," he suggested. "Say ten pounds . . ."

"Not here," I said hastily. "Emilio's watching. He suffers from the strange delusion that I owe him money, poor fellow. I'll have it later."

The floor shook, and the gentleman at the next table grabbed his soup with both hands as it began to slop over. Emilio was coming towards us.

"Belov!" he bellowed. "I have a word with you, please."

"To-morrow," I told him, and made for the door, followed by Mr. Ross, and most of the customers, who were under the impression that the place was about to collapse.

George Granko was a well-built man of about forty, with a thick, wiry crop of greying hair, and heavy, adjustable spectacles with a black, plastic frame that made him look like an owl with a hangover. He slapped the desk.

"Well, Ross!" he snarled. "What is it now? Come on, man. Don't waste my time. Who is this fellow?"

"The ghost of Christmas Past," I told him. "Seen anything of Marley lately?"

"What the devil are you talking about?" he demanded.

"This is Mr. Hek Belov, sir," explained Ross, quickly. "He is the engineer I have engaged to repair the diagnoser."

"Ah!" exclaimed Granko. "I see." He looked me up and down, and I thought there was a slight smile at the corners of that hard mouth. "Can you really fix this thing?" he asked. "You may have to re-build it completely, or even make one from scratch. Can you do it?"

"For a thousand pounds, yes," I told him, "providing the computer is in working order. For a hundred pounds, maybe. you mustn't expect miracles."

"One hundred pounds is the outside price for miracles, Mr. Belov," he replied. "I have had them performed for much less. The threat of unemployment, for instance," he glanced at the manager, who gave a sickly smile, has often produced them. "All right, Ross," he finished, "show Mr. Belov my father's invention. Or perhaps I should say folly," he frowned. "He spent half-a-century, and nearly a hundred thousand pounds on it. I don't intend to repeat this error. A hundred pounds, Mr. Belov. That's the very limit. Goodbye."

"It's in the spares room," explained the manager, as we passed along the completely-automated production line.

There wasn't another human on the premises; but somewhere else, friends, the great machines were turning out thousands of tons of Government goo to keep these missing humans from starving, while Granko's line-up produced the harsh correctives for their flagging systems. This results in a properly balanced society, or something of the kind. The people should be grateful; but they're not, the swine! The politicians can hardly hear themselves talk for the splashing of bodies in the river. It's got that way that they have had to put nets along the Embankment.

"Spares room did I say?" continued the manager. "It's just a junk room. If anything goes wrong we fix it the hard way." He opened a door, and strode into a small room with racks, which were mostly empty, all around the yellow plastic walls. "This is old Miz's folly," he said, indicating something that looked like a cross between a small pipe organ, and a rocket control desk.

"Old Miz was a bit eccentric," he went on. "He was said to have performed some of his experiments in the nude because

he thought that the clothing damped the essential aura of the body, and militated against inspiration."

"That's probably why Archimedes got his best ideas in the bath," I said.

"Quite," agreed the manager. "Old Miz performed some strange experiments. Three-hundred years ago he would have been burnt for a wizard. One thing about him, though. He wasn't mean like his son."

I examined the computer end of the diagnoser, and made a few tests. There was nothing wrong with that. Then I removed the servicing panel on the pipe organ, and gazed inside. There was a mass of wires and components, some familiar, and some not so familiar. To tell the truth, I couldn't even guess at their purpose.

There was a large, black box, and some of the wires to this were charred, or broken. There was a subsidiary circuit, too. Well, perhaps not so subsidiary. It was a dual purpose amplifier for the ask and answer end of the monster.

First thing off I opened the black box. It proved to contain a crystalline block through which some of the wires led, or had led, finally burying themselves in a manikin about a foot high. It appeared to be a man with a white beard, dressed in strange robes covered in peculiar symbols. I put the lid on again. It looked like voodoo brought up to date. Fakery, of course.

I may have mentioned before that I think in terms of solid circuitry. It works like this. Show me a circuit sliced in half, or torn out any old how, and immediately the natural hook-up flashes on the inward eye like poetry. I may not know what it is for ; but there it indubitably is.

Friends, I think I should have been a poet. Inspiration is the secret of my amazing success. Where the theoretical hack juggles with a mass of figures, and finally comes up with a shaky solution, which he improves on by experimentation, old Belov has the circuit in an instant. It's a gift. You either have it or you haven't, and a headful of calculus, whatever the devil that is, is no substitute.

"I shall want these things," I told Ross, scribbling a few items on a piece of paper.

He looked at the list, nodding and saying "Yes, yes," as he mentally ticked off each item, and then he came to something that seemed to afford him some surprise.

"How are you going to wire in three bottles of beer, and a large meat pie?" he asked.

Such stupidity!

"You wouldn't understand," I said, patiently. "Just get them, there's a good manager."

The re-wiring took me about three hours. The manager had some paper work to attend to, and he wasn't there when I switched the thing on. There was a satisfying hum from it, and I took the lid off the black box again.

The little manikin was glowing all over, and he seemed to look straight at me out of his pale, blue eyes. There was a sardonic glint in them, and when I moved to one side to observe him from a different angle his eyes followed me. An illusion, of course. Just the same I was glad to put the lid back on. I had an unaccountable feeling of something not being quite right. I wondered, vaguely, what made them leave off burning wizards.

"She's ticking over," I told Ross on the intercom. "Someone will have to be diagnosed."

And the best of luck, because it wasn't going to be old Belov.

"I am not sure that I like this," complained the manager, seating himself in the metal chair, as though he expected to be electrocuted. "The last time I did this George Granko muffed the controls somehow, and set the thing on fire. It frightened the life out of me."

"My friend," I reassured him, "I'm in control this time. But, of course, I can't guarantee another man's brain-child. It mightn't work. Just take hold of those electrodes," I instructed him, "and I'll check the controls."

There was a red mark on each of four dials, which I guessed to be the optimum setting. I checked that all the needles were dead on these. Three of them were bias controls, and the other was power. There were also some controls which I set halfway.

"All right," I told the sweating manager. "Relate your symptoms."

"I'm sick," said the manager, peevishly. "I'm sick and tired. I'm fed up. Nothing seems to go right for me. I wish I had a million pounds."

"All you've got is impending poverty," I told him. "We've all got that."

The machine clicked briefly, and then coughed.

"You are suffering from an anxiety neurosis," it told him in tones of measured resonance. "You should take Granko tranquillising capsules, and change your job."

John Ross looked as though he had seen a ghost.

"That's old Granko's voice," he said in amazement.

"Whom did you expect?" I asked. "Shakespeare's? Old Granko made the thing, didn't he?"

"Just the same, it's a bit of a shock," he said. "Anxiety neurosis, eh? That's nonsense, of course."

"It works," I pointed out. "What more do you want?"

"That's right," he agreed. "I'll arrange to have it set up in Lewridges to-morrow. George Granko will be pleased. He might even pay us. I've been using my own money up to now. You can sit in the chair now," he added, "and give me a chance to get used to the controls."

I changed places with him.

"I suffer from pretty nearly everything," I told it. "What do you recommend?"

First the preliminary clicking and the cough, and then the same carefully modulated voice told me, briefly: "Euthanasia."

"You can't quarrel with that," said the manager. "The thing's almost human."

"If it were I'd sock it on the nose," I said, sourly. "Get Granko up to have a look at it."

George Granko stalked in ten minutes later, and glared at us.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Very well indeed," I told him. "Just sit here, and take hold of the electrodes. Then tell it what foul diseases you are suffering from."

"People are what affect me most," he said, darkly. "People like you."

He grabbed the electrodes, and I switched on, and manipulated the controls. I swear I gave it no more power than previously; but what happened next made my scalp crawl. For a split second in front of the diagnoser there stood an old man in a conical hat, profusely decorated with stars, and wearing a white robe covered with zodiacal symbols. It was the manikin vastly blown up; but looking as real as any human ever did.

George Granko seemed to be holding the hands of the old fellow, and looking as though he were about to have a stroke. He dropped his hands suddenly, and let the electrodes fall.

The old man vanished, and George was sitting there gibbering like a lunatic.

"Old Miz Granko," said the manager in a strangled voice. "Did you see him?"

"So that's who it was?" I said, putting my hat on. "Good-bye."

"No you don't," yelled the manager, grabbing me by the arm. "You've had ten pounds off me, and until I get it back from G.G. you are sticking around."

George Granko was stumbling about the room in a daze.

"Now's your chance to touch him for a rise," I urged. "His resistance has gone."

It hadn't gone for long. He seemed to take a grip on himself, clenching his fists, and shaking his head vigorously.

"All right," he said, hoarsely, "I don't know how you did it, and I don't want to know. I'll have this cursed thing broken up tomorrow. And in case I forget, Ross, you're fired as from to-night."

"What about the money I've spent?" wailed the manager.

"I'll stop it out of your salary," promised Granko, and departed, with one last, fearful glance at the diagnoser.

"I like this grasp of economics," I said in admiration. "Getting rich must present few problems to a brain like that."

"He's got a heart as big as a walnut," said Ross, bitterly. "And now he proposes to add murder to his other sins. He's going to destroy his own father by dismantling the diagnoser."

He sat on a nearby bench, and began to chew his nails. His brow was corrugated in thought.

"If we could only spring Miz out of that thing," he said, at last.

"You mean you really believe he's in there?" I asked, uneasily.

The manager nodded.

"Like Merlin in the tree. He's in there all right. Getting him out so that he stays out is the problem. He'd soon put dear George in his place. He hated the sight of him."

I can't stick nuts without wine ; but I still had a bottle of beer left. So I drank this while I mulled over the problem of the apparition. Supposing, just supposing that there *was* something in what the manager had said. There might be some profit in agreeing with him at the very least. Tcha ! The things I have to do for a living. I went over to Ross.

"The way I see it," I said, "old Miz is out of phase with this world, in a manner of speaking. Two material objects can't occupy the same place at the same time : but they can occupy the same space if one is slightly ahead, or slightly behind the other."

"That's it !" shouted the manager, excitedly. He jumped off the bench. "By careful phase alignment of the circuits it should be possible to materialise him. What do you think ?"

I was sorry I'd mentioned it. Phase re-alignment is a very tricky job. It is even more tricky if you are not very sure what it means.

"Let's have the black box off," I suggested.

This was easily removed. Just four bolts held it. I disconnected the whole shebang, and took it over to a bench. We found that the 'crystalline block' was made up of thin sheets of clear plastic. Leafing through them I discovered that one of them had printed on it a colour photograph of Miz Granko. This was the 'manikin.'

"Sixty-three sheets from the front," mused Ross. "Let me see, now. Thirty-one days in January, twenty-eight in February . . . Yes, I thought so. Sixty-three days brings us to to-day. Don't you see what's happening ?"

I did, of course. He was going off his head.

"No," I said. "You tell me."

"Yesterday," he said, dramatically, "this picture was, I believe, on the sixty-second sheet from the front. To-morrow it will be on the sixty-fourth sheet. He's progressing through these sheets as though they were days in the year located in real time. You'll find there's a sheet for each day of the year."

He sat back, confidently, while I counted them. There were five-hundred transparent, plastic sheets, and old Miz's picture appeared on no less than thirty-two of them, spread out at intervals through the block. So his theory took a nose dive. He looked crestfallen. Then I examined the pictures more closely, and the answer became obvious.

"It looks," I pointed out, "as though each one of these photographs has been taken from a slightly different angle. You know what I think ? This is some kind of tri-di projector, and that explains the image of old Miz standing there apparently holding hands with his son."

"Maybe," said the manager, dubiously; "but I should like to point out that he didn't hold my hands. And he didn't appear when you held the electrodes."

"It's probably because of this new economy drive," I hazarded. "They're load-shedding all the time. We just copped for the period of reduced power. Let's try it again."

We did. This time the image of Miz Granko stood half in and half out of the machine, and told Ross what salve to use for athlete's foot, which he hadn't got.

The manager was sweating when I switched off. "Uncanny, isn't it," he gasped. "No wonder George Granko was shaken. You seem to feel the grip of his hands. Old Miz was clever all right. There's no doubt about it. This is just the gimmick to sell our product," he added, enthusiastically. "The founder of the firm gives advice from beyond the grave. How do you like that? It has just the right touch of the macabre to appeal to the present-day consumer." His face clouded. "And that damned fool wants to smash it up! He's a latter-day Luddite. That's what he is."

"We'll beat him yet," I said, cheerfully. "Trust old Belov. I've just thought of an idea that will knock him sidewise."

I made a short recording, and arranged to feed this through the amplifying circuit. The two metal electrodes were, of course, automatically operated by pressure from the hands. I bound these with tape so that they didn't have to be gripped to operate the diagnoser. Then I fixed an inconspicuous pedal switch for the power, and brought it out ten yards away.

I switched on with my foot, and old Miz appeared and made a little speech with somewhat blurred mouth movements, because I couldn't get the hang of the synchronisation process at such short notice. Still, it *was* the voice of old Miz, and this surprised the manager.

"Very good," he pronounced. "That should fix Georgie boy. All we have to do now is get him here. Old Miz's voice, too. How did you manage that?"

"A simple plug-in tone filter," I explained, and pulled it out to show him. "Plug-in because we may have to revert to normal in a hurry. I had to adjust the speed a bit, too. Anyway, you can get Granko up here as soon as you like."

"What shall I tell him?" asked Ross.

"Tell him the computer has gone mad, and the plant is turning out wooden Indians. Tell him the place is on fire. Or you can tell him that flying saucers have landed at last—right through the roof—and a gentleman from Mars is asking for him. You'll think of something."

I pushed him towards the intercom; but he stood there scratching his head for an idea. So I switched through, and George Granko's sour face appeared immediately.

"Are you still on the premises?" he inquired, nastily. "It's no use asking me for any money," he added, quickly. "You won't get a penny piece from me."

"Why don't you drop dead, you sub-human horror?" I said, pleasantly.

Granko's face seemed to swell with rage. Spluttering and fuming he switched off.

I have always found that psychology is most effective when used as a blunt instrument.

George Granko came storming into the spares room like a tornado with clothes. If anything got in his way he kicked it aside. When he was still a little way from me I switched on, and old Miz burst out of the diagnoser. It stopped George dead in his tracks. Then Miz said his piece.

"George, my boy," he intoned, "I am far from pleased with you. You have a very efficient manager, and you should treat him better. It is high time he was offered a partnership. And don't forget that great cyberneticist Hek Belov. Pay him what you owe him, or I'll haunt you for the rest of your life."

Right off I knew it wasn't going to work. I have a nose for that kind of thing. It is a sort of sixth sense. Besides, Miz Granko was speaking with my voice. I'd forgotten to replace the tone filter.

Ross staggered a few paces backwards, and collapsed against a bench. I released my foot on the switch, and the image of old Miz vanished.

His son grinned. Things were becoming clearer to him. I walked across the room to the bench where I'd left my hat, and picked it up. There didn't seem to be anything else I could do.

"You forgot to replace the tone filter," said the manager, brokenly, as I passed him.

"I have a tricky memory," I told him. "My one failing. There are occasions when even my superlative genius just can't make up for it."

He said a dirty word, but without any enthusiasm. George Granko laughed out loud. I ignored him, and went out whistling a snatch of tune from *The Gondoliers*. It takes a lot to get me down.

To tell the truth, friends, I could have cut my throat!

Nowadays, ten pounds will just about keep one man for one week. But this is a Government estimate. Three days after the Granko affair I was sitting in Emilio's before a very empty table, having just been refused even a paltry cheese sandwich, when in walked John Ross looking extremely prosperous.

"My friend," I said, taking him by both hands, "I am very pleased to see that you are doing so well. You are doing well, aren't you?"

"Very well," he smiled. "I'm still with Granko. That little episode with the diagnoser tickled his sense of humour. Also I was able to convince him about the value of the diagnoser as a sales gimmick. Orders are flooding in already. I think he was relieved, too, that old Miz was only a stereoscopic image. Anyway, he increased my salary, and I look all set for a share in the firm someday. I bought a new suit on the strength of it."

"Good for you," I said. "I'm very pleased to hear it. But you haven't forgotten old Belov's part in the affair, have you?"

"No," he said, and offered me a flat parcel. "I thought I'd find you here, and I want you to have this as a little token of my appreciation."

I took it from him. It was about the size and shape of three hundred pounds in fivers.

"Thank you, my friend," I said, with deep sincerity. "You are an angel of light; but it is only what I deserve."

"Precisely," he smiled. "Well, goodbye Mr. Belov. I must be off now."

"Goodbye," I returned, and sighed, happily.

I watched him go through the door into the street. A friend in need. A great man. There aren't many of his kind in the world to-day. Then, very carefully, I stripped off the wrapping paper, and found, to my surprise that I was holding a book bound in grey plastic. I looked at the title, which was in gold

letters. It was called *Diseases Of The Memory—Their Cause And Cure*.

I rushed to the door, and out after him. I could just see him in the distance. He was changing from the walkway to the slow East ped-strip, and then over to the fast lane.

"You ungrateful swine !" I shouted, shaking my fist after him. "You slimy snake ! You damned robber !"

He didn't turn round, and I was about to hurl the book away when something fluttered from it. It was one of the new, cream five-pound notes. A slight breeze took it, and as I pursued it back towards Emilio's his fat hand shot out from the doorway, and grabbed it, unerringly. There was nothing else in the book.

I could have wept.

Instead, I went into Emilio's, and looked him straight in the eye.

"'Ave a cheese sandwich," he said, grinning.

Edward Mackin

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